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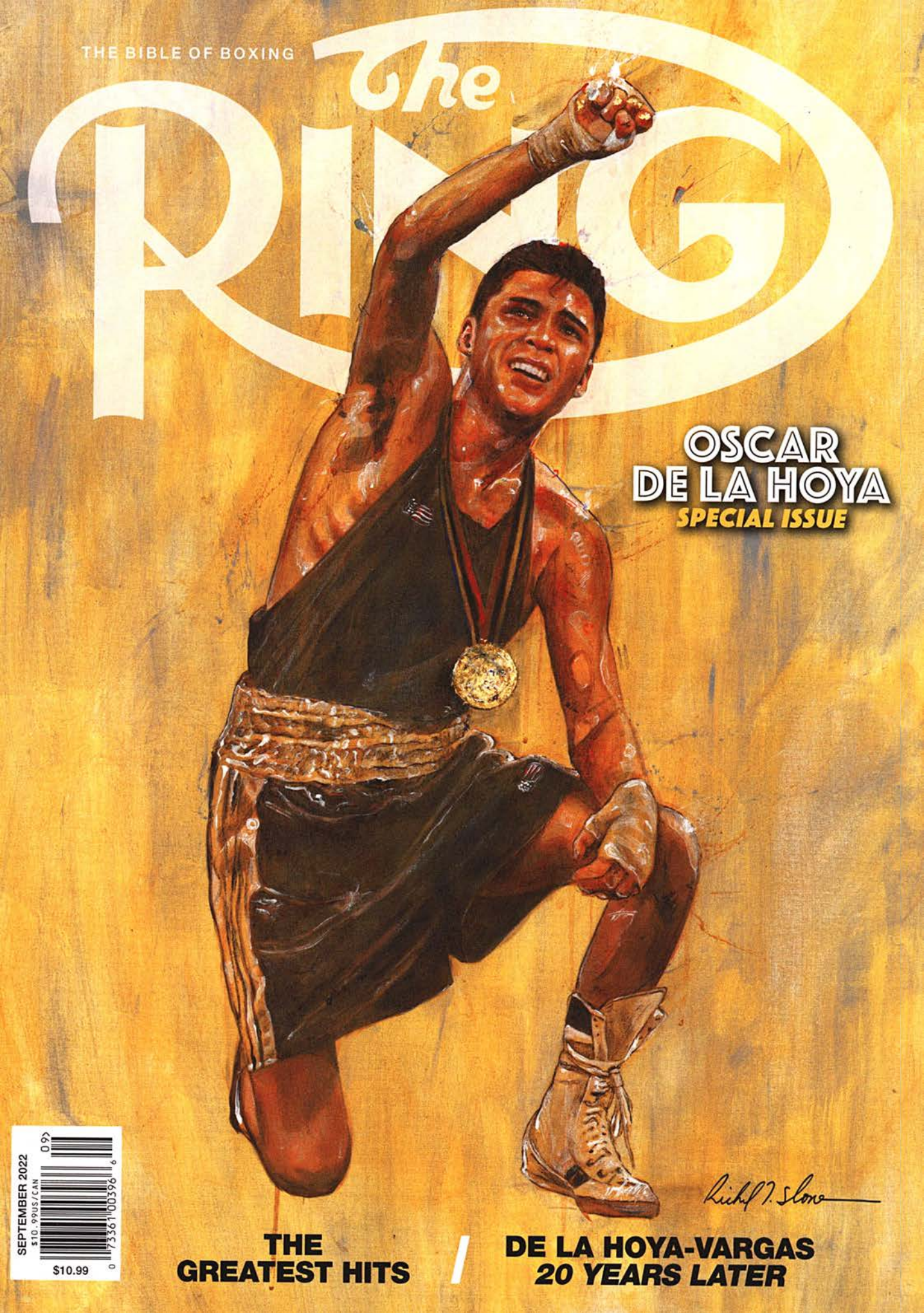

OSCAR DE LA HOYA
SPECIAL ISSUE

Richard T. Slone

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Oscar De La Hoya poses with his bronze likeness outside Staples Center (now the Crypto.com Arena) in Los Angeles.

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COVER ART BY RICHARD T. SLONE

Oscar De La Hoya had a hard time landing clean punches on Pernell Whitaker (as did every other boxer who fought "Sweet Pea") but he connected enough against the all-time great to earn a unanimous decision.

PARTY OF A LIFETIME

What an unforgettable experience it was being at the International Boxing Hall of Fame for the historic Induction Weekend. From the events and exhibits (the actual ring from the Fight of the Century), to mingling with fans and several luminaries (including longtime fave Shane Mosley), I picked a great time to visit the Hall for the first time – and I can't wait to return! In fact, when I got back home, my wife asked me whether I felt changed by the experience. I told her that it wasn't so much life-changing as it was life-*affirming*. Seeing and hearing Andre Ward, Bernard Hopkins and Marian Trimiar speak so earnestly about realizing a coveted dream affirmed to me the virtues of family, determination, sacrifice and the human spirit. I arrived at Canastota a boxing fan, but I left a member of the "boxing family," as Bill Caplan put it.

Bob Holmes
North Carolina

A lifetime boxing fan living in Japan, I continue to be pleasantly taken aback by the array of Japanese talent in the lighter divisions. Although the Japanese have been historically successful among the smaller guys, there is a real sense that they could indeed command serious respect for some time to come in the 48kg-53.5kg (strawweight-bantamweight) range, with six current world champions to boast.

Spurred on by Naoya Inoue's destruction of Nonito Donaire, we were treated to another kind of masterclass a few days later as we watched Hiroto Kyoguchi dish out a feast for the eyes in Guadalajara, with an excellent defense of his junior flyweight strap.

Exciting times are ahead for the Japanese, albeit much to the unawareness of the casual boxing fan. Perhaps an Inoue vs. Stephen Fulton superfight will truly allow the rising sun to shine bright in the eyes of a global audience.

"Sugar" Ray Roche
Tokyo

OK, I think Naoya Inoue has now proven that he belongs right atop the pound-for-pound list. And if Crawford and Spence settle things in the fall, then we can debate over who is number one.

Drew Adkins
Red Deer, Alberta

It's rare that I have seen two of my favorite fighters fight against each other. Congratulations to Naoya Inoue. I love when a country has a hero and when they're completely behind him. Inoue is one of Asia's most exciting fighters today.

I am not even disappointed Donaire lost to Inoue, but we cannot dismiss Nonito Donaire's legacy.

In today's boxing era, Who can say, "I never ducked anyone at all"?

Who can say, "I always fought legitimate contenders who were never questionable"?

Who can say they are a high-profile professional boxer who is willing to commit to comprehensive year-round drug testing?

Who can say they or have been

one of the most "active" professional boxers around without keeping their fans waiting?

Thank you, Nonito. I have always been a fan. There's nothing to prove anymore! Mabuhay!

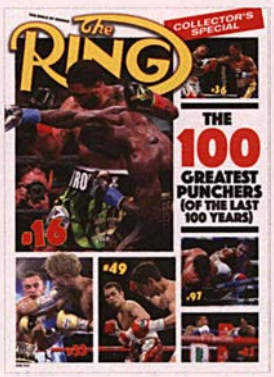
Errol Ian Ave Acosta
Jacksonville, North Carolina

I had the pleasure of seeing Joe Cordina demolish Kenichi Ogawa inside two rounds live in Cardiff on the 4th of June, and it was a sight to behold. Most people (myself included) were expecting a nail-biting 12-round chess match and hoped it would not end up being a step too far for the Welsh Wizard. But he certainly announced his arrival on the world stage with a bang by producing a KO-of–the-year contender against the tricky Japanese champion. The atmosphere was electric in the Motorpoint, doubtless due its relatively small size. I certainly felt like I could've been watching the fight in a gym rather than an arena.

Rhys
London

I just got my second issue of The Ring (June 2022, "The Greatest Punchers of the Past 100 Years") after a hiatus of 40 years and it's great. Maybe sometime you could extend the 100-year rule on punchers and include Jack Johnson.

Bernard T. Walker
Creswell, N.C.



Reading the issue about the 100 best punchers, I was surprised to learn that The Ring subscribes to the theory that it was an unguarded secret that Jack Johnson took a dive against Jess Willard (mentioned in the section on Jack Dempsey). From what I've read, Johnson was out of shape and took Willard lightly. He tried his best to take Willard out early and later succumbed as much to the Havana heat as he did Willard's assault. Does a fighter taking a dive go 26 rounds in 110 degree heat and bet $10,000 on himself to win? I understand Johnson claimed he took a dive months later in exchange for the right to return to the U.S., but euphemistically, Johnson had a penchant for storytelling. Seems to me it's time that Willard gets credit for his win.

Randy Cook

I'm a little late responding, but here is one of my thoughts relating to this excellent article: If George Foreman is No. 5 and Earnie Shavers is No. 6, where is Ron Lyle? He went toe-to-toe with both guys and gave them both the worst beatings of their careers. He should be in the top 50.

David Mellor
Laguna Niguel, Calif.

I read a quote from Hector Camacho that gave me a bad feeling. He said, "One day the light goes dead and people forget you." I hate that he felt like he was forgotten! To all fighters out there, former and current, you are the complete opposite of forgotten. You are talked about and remembered with the fondest of memories. To this day, I still tell young people, "Go to YouTube and check out Matthew Saad Muhammad, Little Red Lopez, Andy Ganigan, Bobby Chacon or James Scott" and so many other names. You don't even have to be a champion to be remembered or talked about. You just had to have passion for the sport and give it your all. With all the barber shop talk and gym talk among boxing fans young and old, forgotten is one thing fighters will never be to the true fans of the sport.

Victor Rivero
Pacifica, Calif.

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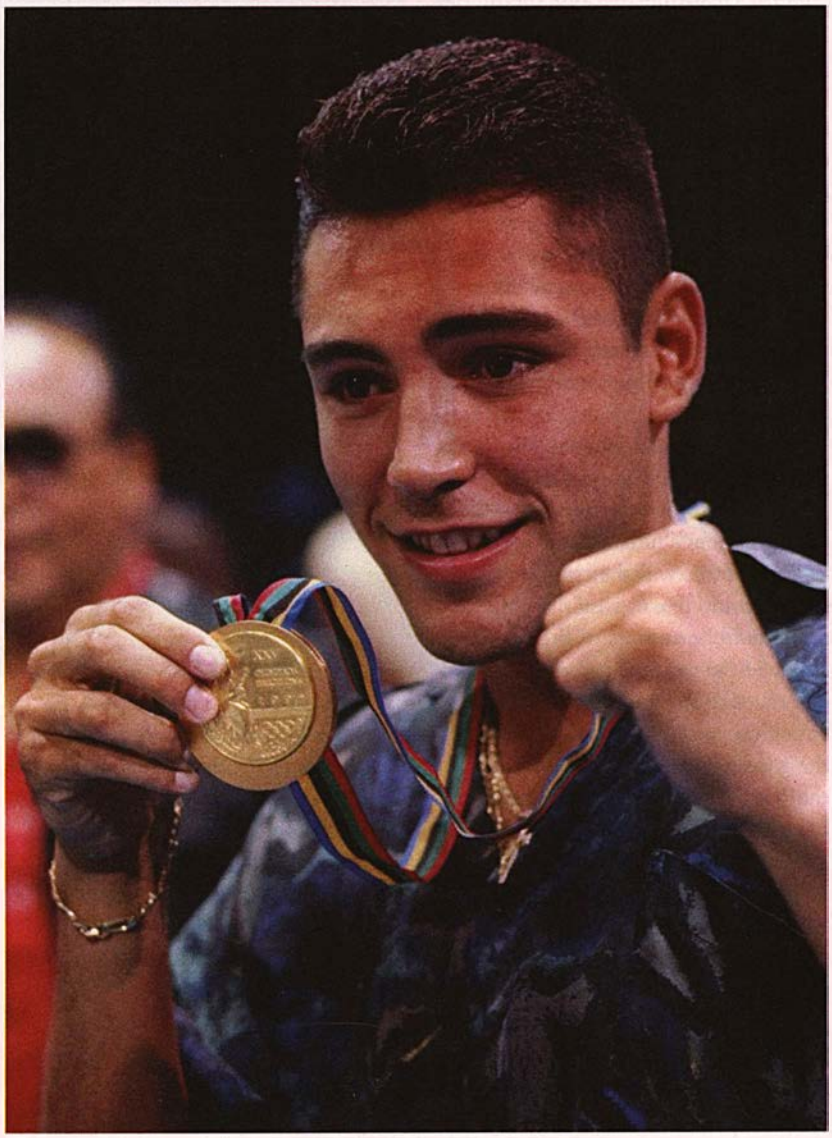
HOLLY STEIN

FOREWORD BY STEVE SPRINGER

A BOY, A MOTHER AND A GOLDEN DREAM



De La Hoya's nickname comes from Olympic success, but his motivation was much deeper.

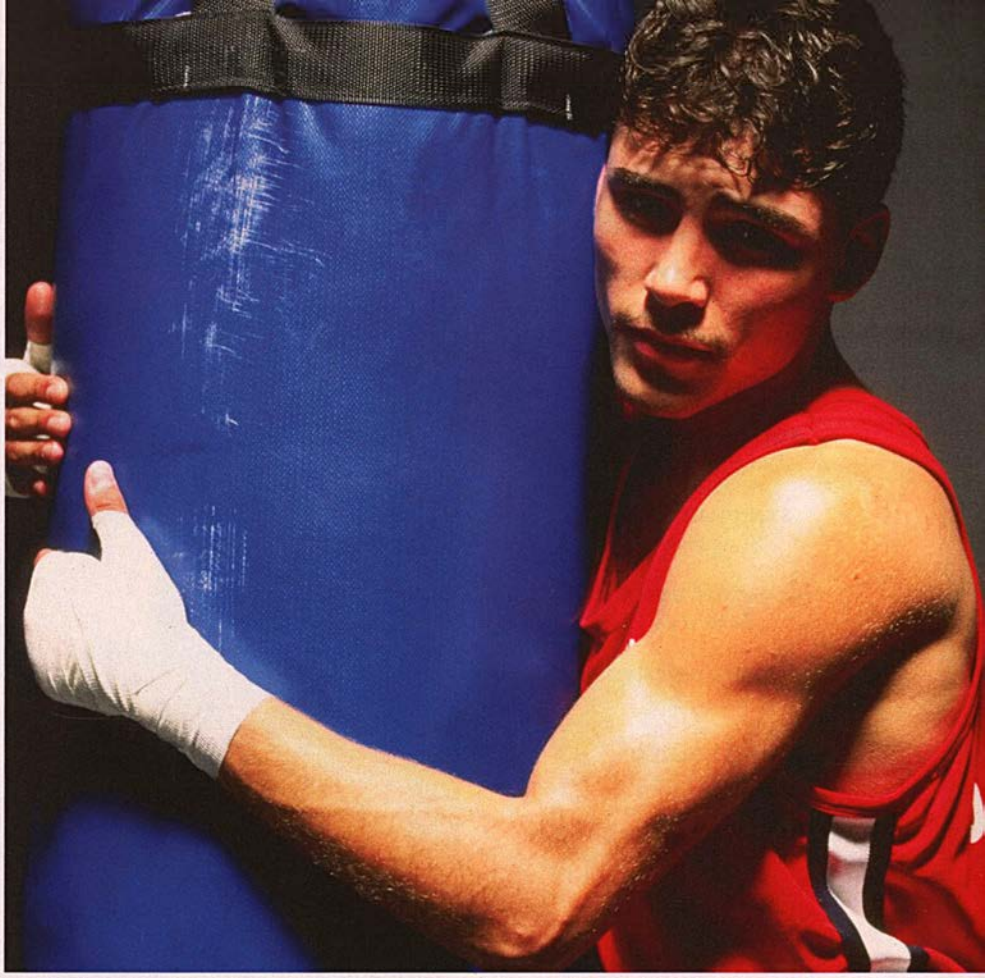
It has been 30 years since Oscar De La Hoya stood on a platform in Barcelona, Spain, as an Olympic gold medal was placed around his neck, 30 years since the dream that had long resided in his mind became reality, 30 years since he, at age 19, surpassed his grandfather, Vicente, his father, Joel, and his older brother, Joel Jr., all of whom had put on gloves and stepped into a ring to do battle.

Oscar's own boxing career didn't exactly start off on a high note. The first time gloves were laced on his hands, it was in the backyard of his uncle, Lalo, in East L.A.

Was Oscar excited? Horrified would be a better description.

It was at one of the regular weekend family gatherings, the women inside cooking, the men outside sparring.

Let's put George in there, somebody said. But who would he fight? All eyes turned to Oscar. His eyes stared at the ground.



Didn't matter. They grabbed him, got the gloves on and plopped him down in front of George.

Wasn't really fair, because there was a big age difference. George was 6, Oscar just 4.

Predictably, it didn't last long. George hit Oscar in the nose and down he went. No blood, just tears.

He quickly got up and ran to his father, who was less than excited about his son's ring debut.

Oscar was ready for retirement that afternoon, swearing he would never again put on a pair of gloves.

"I was petrified. I hated it," he said of boxing.

His father was determined to get him back into a ring. He knew that this was the culture Oscar would live in all his life and would be an outcast if he shunned the sport all his peers embraced. But Joel was wise enough to avoid forcing Oscar to put the gloves right back on, even though that's what he would have loved to have done. Instead, he dropped the subject altogether for six months. And even then, he told Oscar they were going down to the local gym where Joel Jr. was working out, but only to watch.

When that went well, Joel told Oscar that it was time to put the gloves back on, but only for him to hit the heavy bag.

Slowly, Oscar began to enjoy being in the gym, so much so that he began following his older brother there even when his father wasn't around.

Soon, Oscar's father got him a trainer, Joe Minjarez, who taught Oscar to throw the left hook and use the jab, his two greatest weapons when he became a professional.

By the time he reached the sixth grade, Oscar had set a goal. When his teacher asked all the students in class what they wanted to do when they grew up, Oscar stood up and said he wanted to be an Olympic gold medalist in boxing. Thinking Oscar was mocking the assignment, his teacher reprimanded him and made him stay after class.

While Joel had focused Oscar's mind on boxing, his heart belonged to his mother. Though she hadn't previously been a fight fan, Cecilia Gonzalez De La Hoya, after learning of Oscar's Olympic dream, instantly became his biggest supporter. She may not have physically been in his corner, but emotionally, she was right there.

"We are a team," she told him.

What they soon learned, however, was that this team was doomed. When Oscar was 17, Cecilia revealed the terrifying secret she had been keeping from him. With three words, she turned his world upside down and he has never been the same.

"I have cancer," she said.

With two years to go until the '92 Olympics, Oscar decided to quit boxing. "I want to be here with you," he told her.

Reminding him that this was not just his dream, but hers as well, Cecilia said, "I want you to go even though I'm not going to be there."

De La Hoya rededicated himself to boxing to honor his mother.

The very next day, she died at the age of 39.

For weeks, Oscar wanted nothing to do with boxing. And then one day, he heard her voice in his head, telling him that, with her gone, it was up to him to keep the dream alive.

"You know what," he told himself, "I'm going to do it for her."

Sitting in his house, Oscar leaped to his feet, ran outside and kept running all the way to the gym five miles away. When he got there, he put on his gloves and hopped into the ring for a sparring session with Rudy Zavala, a fighter who later became a decent pro. But that day, Zavala didn't stand a chance. Oscar went after him as if it was the final three minutes of a championship fight, pounding away, releasing all the tension, anxiety and grief he had been dealing with for so long.

Even when the bell rang, even when

MIKE POWELL/ALI SPORT

the trainers yelled at him to stop, Oscar kept flailing away until finally he collapsed in tears.

From then on, he was a man with a mission, a mission he accomplished in Barcelona when he knocked down Marco Rudolph of Germany with just over a minute to go in the gold-medal match. Rudolph got up, but Oscar was too far ahead in points to be caught, avenging a defeat Rudolph had handed him a year earlier at the world championships in Australia.

The gold medal belonged to Oscar and, when he looked into the audience where his family was sitting, he saw, in his mind's eye, Cecilia sitting with them.

He was numb. He had won the medal he had been obsessed with for years, yet he had lost his mother, the most precious thing in his life.

There were thousands waiting to cheer Oscar at the airport. The media was everywhere as he went home, even broadcasting from his house. All he wanted was to go to the cemetery to show Cecilia the prize they had won.

The "Golden Boy" era began with a victory over Germany's Marco Rudolph in Barcelona.

MIKE POWELL /ALLSPORT

Finally, Oscar told the surrounding reporters and cameramen, "Can you please give me some time? I want to go to the cemetery and give the gold medal to my mother. And I want to do it alone. Can you respect my wishes?"

They did.

Oscar, of course, went on to a storied career, winning multiple world titles spread over six weight classes. He finished with a record of 39-6 with 30 knockouts and then went on to become a successful promoter as the head of Golden Boy Promotions.

Through the long journey, he felt his mother was always by his side.

When Oscar decided to take a brief career detour into the music industry and record an album, it was with Cecilia in mind. She had loved to sing and sometimes her son would sing right along with her. One time, she got into her car in front of the house, turned on some music and loudly started singing along. Oscar soon joined her and the two of them sang a duet, laughing all the way through. It was the moment he still treasures when he thinks of her.

So becoming a singer seemed like a logical way for him to keep Cecilia close.

"If I boxed because of my father, why not sing because of my mother," he said.

He was even nominated for a Grammy Award.

Oscar paid the ultimate tribute to his mother by contributing $350,000 to the White Memorial Hospital cancer center, now named the Cecilia Gonzalez De La Hoya Cancer Center.

To this day, Oscar feels his mother is still there for him as much as he is for her.

He was convinced of that late one night when he took his brother's new Mercedes out to pick up some taquitos at a fast-food place. Driving home, he was shocked when the lights suddenly went out, the engine died and the car grinded to a halt right in the fast lane of the freeway.

When he saw the lights of several vehicles appear behind him, rapidly bearing down on him, and knew that they wouldn't be able to see him with his lights off, he reached for his cell phone to call 911 but couldn't find it. So instead, he jumped out of the car and raced to safety on the shoulder of the freeway.

Seconds later, a truck and several cars, unable to stop, collided, destroying Oscar's brother's car, but, fortunately, no one was killed.

Making his way into the pileup to help anyone injured, he found one driver with blood all over his face.

Nevertheless, the driver had a smile on his face as he looked up in amazement and said, "It's Oscar De La Hoya! Now I can tell everybody, Oscar De La Hoya broke my nose."

Having narrowly missed serious injury or even death, Oscar was sure he knew who had saved him.

"I am convinced my mother was looking out for me that night," he said. "I say that because there was a reason I couldn't find my phone. It turns out it had fallen between the seats just before the power went out. If I had known where it was, I would have used it to call 911, been sitting there when that truck came barreling down the road and might well have been crushed to death."

As he spoke, he looked up with a smile for his guardian angel.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

OSCAR DE LA HOYA: AN APPRECIATION

No fighter gets out of boxing unscathed.

No fighter goes into boxing unscathed either.

For much of his life, Oscar De La Hoya has struggled with demons outside the ring and in it. He has battled substance abuse, been betrayed by people he trusted, and faced other formidable challenges that are a matter of public record. He emerged from the 1992 Olympics at age 19 with a gold medal in the lightweight division and became known worldwide as "The Golden Boy." But he was more complex than people imagined and bruised easily on the inside. His life was often far from golden.

As an adolescent, De La Hoya built his life around boxing. "There was a time when I was 14 or 15," he later reminisced, "when I realized that someday I could make a living from boxing. At that point, I began to focus more on boxing than on school."

He won his first pro title at age 21. The world was his oyster, or so it seemed. He was so fresh and young. Dr. Margaret Goodman conducted her first pre-fight physical with Oscar that year. "I remember asking him how many years he would fight," Goodman recalls. "He told me, 'I am going to retire at 26.'"

He was 10 years off the mark.

Fighters are paid for their marketability (which is different from their ability, although the two are often entwined). De La Hoya was the right man in the right place at the right time. Initially, the powers that be in boxing embraced him as "the anti-Tyson." Then he benefited from the absence of a true heavyweight champion that the sport could rally around.

He loved the limelight and the big event. His 19 fights on pay-per-view generated 13,850,000 buys.

"A lot of people think I had everything handed to me on a silver platter," De La Hoya said when he was in his prime. "People see the actual fight and say, 'Wow, he won all this money in one night.' But it's not that easy. People don't realize how many sacrifices I've had to make over the years. It was a long road to where I'm at now. One of the things that bothers me most is that very few people really understand what it means to be a fighter. It's not easy being an athlete, especially at this level, and on top of that, being a fighter."

He was always willing to go in tough. De La Hoya had 10 fights against men who were subsequently inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. That number will rise as more of Oscar's opponents, such as Manny Pacquiao, enter the hallowed halls in Canastota. BoxRec.com lists him as having fought 24 times against men who were current or former world champions and winning titles in six different weight classes.

One gauge of celebrity status is name recognition. Like Madonna Ciccone and Oprah Winfrey, De La Hoya became a first-name phenomenon.

In his glory years, Oscar was a superb ambassador for boxing. He mattered to people who didn't care about the sport. He was their window into the sweet science. And when they looked at him, the view was good.

De La Hoya talked with fans, posed for pictures and signed autographs. "It's tiring sometimes," he admitted. "I'll be out on the street with my wife. We'll just want to be alone and people will come over to me constantly. But when it doesn't happen, if I go somewhere and no one comes up to me, I miss it. So I guess you can say that I love it, I

STEPHEN DUNN

De La Hoya remains a huge fan favorite wherever he goes.

hate it, and I can't live without it."

He was clean-cut with no tattoos or body piercings. Men admired him; teenage girls adored him. He was conscious of the image he projected and worked a room as well as anyone. Many high-profile athletes arrive at functions, sit at a table surrounded by bodyguards and talk only with people they already know. Once Oscar arrived, he moved from person to person, saying hello to everyone.

He was a crossover star of the highest order. One could check off the boxes … Olympic gold medal … movie-star handsome … bilingual … and he could fight.

Oscar was also a symbol of Hispanic American empowerment.

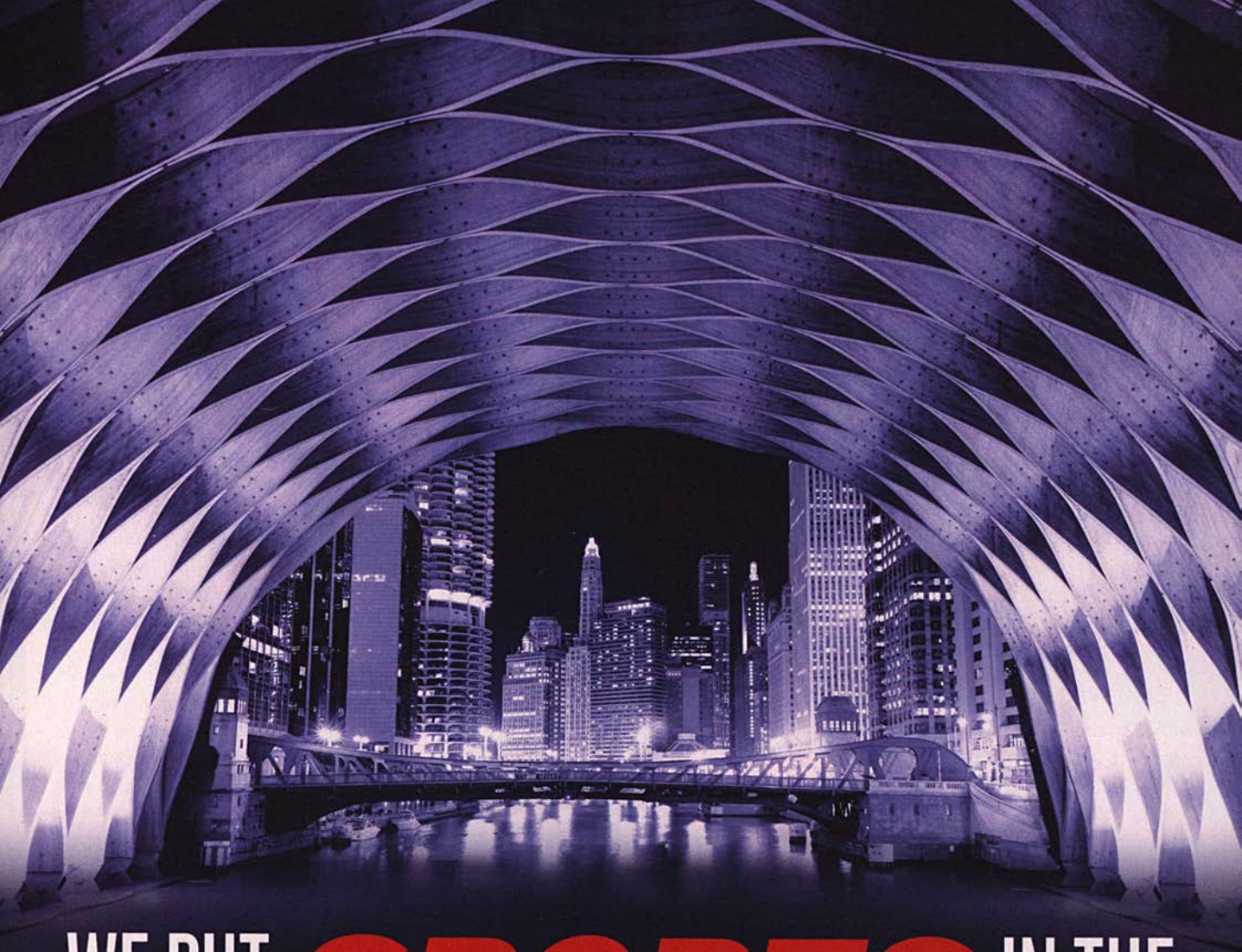
In creating Golden Boy Promotions, De La Hoya leveraged his marketability as a fighter to become more successful as a promoter than any fighter before or since. He was the principal shareholder in Golden Boy Sports and Entertainment Group, which had five subsidiaries: (1) Golden Boy Promotions; (2) Golden Boy Management, which represented fighters; (3) Golden Boy Television and Film, which produced programming; (4) Golden Boy Videos, which owned visual rights to fights, including his own; and (5) Golden Boy Music, which owned the rights to CDs and music videos. Later, other subsidiaries were added, including Sports and Entertainment Publications, which includes The Ring magazine.

Golden Boy Real Estate Group owned a large stake in an office tower in downtown Los Angeles and a minority interest in a second office tower in New York. Golden Boy Corporate Holdings had an interest in CPK Media, which gave it a stake in La Opinion (then the largest Spanish-language daily in the United States) and El Diario La Prensa (the nation's oldest Spanish-language newspaper). De La Hoya also had endorsement contracts with Visa and Nestle and a licensing deal for his own line of clothing.

And, oh yes. Oscar owned a 25 percent interest in the Houston Dynamo soccer club that he sold last year for a sum reported to be in excess of $50 million.

We live in an age when people – particularly young people – tend to be oblivious to what happened and who made it happen in an earlier time. They should understand that Oscar De La Hoya's importance radiated far beyond boxing. In and out of the ring, he lit up the sky when he was young.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Broken Dreams: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.



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FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BY TOM GRAY

JERMELL CHARLO

It took almost 22 rounds, but it was all worth it.

Jermell Charlo emerged from his two-fight rivalry with Argentina's Brian Castano as the first undisputed junior middleweight champion since Winky Wright held that distinction in 2004. In what was arguably a career-best performance, Charlo scored a decisive 10th-round knockout over the previously unbeaten Castano at the Dignity Health Sports Park in Carson, California. The official time was 2:33.

In July of last year, Charlo and Castano battled to a 12-round split decision draw in Texas. Both men fought well in what was a legitimately close contest, and the result was a fair one. However, it was Charlo who made all the necessary adjustments in the rematch. He spent less time on the ropes, punched with more authority and was considerably more active this time around. Castano's two-fisted assaults became less and less frequent, and eventually he was there for the taking.

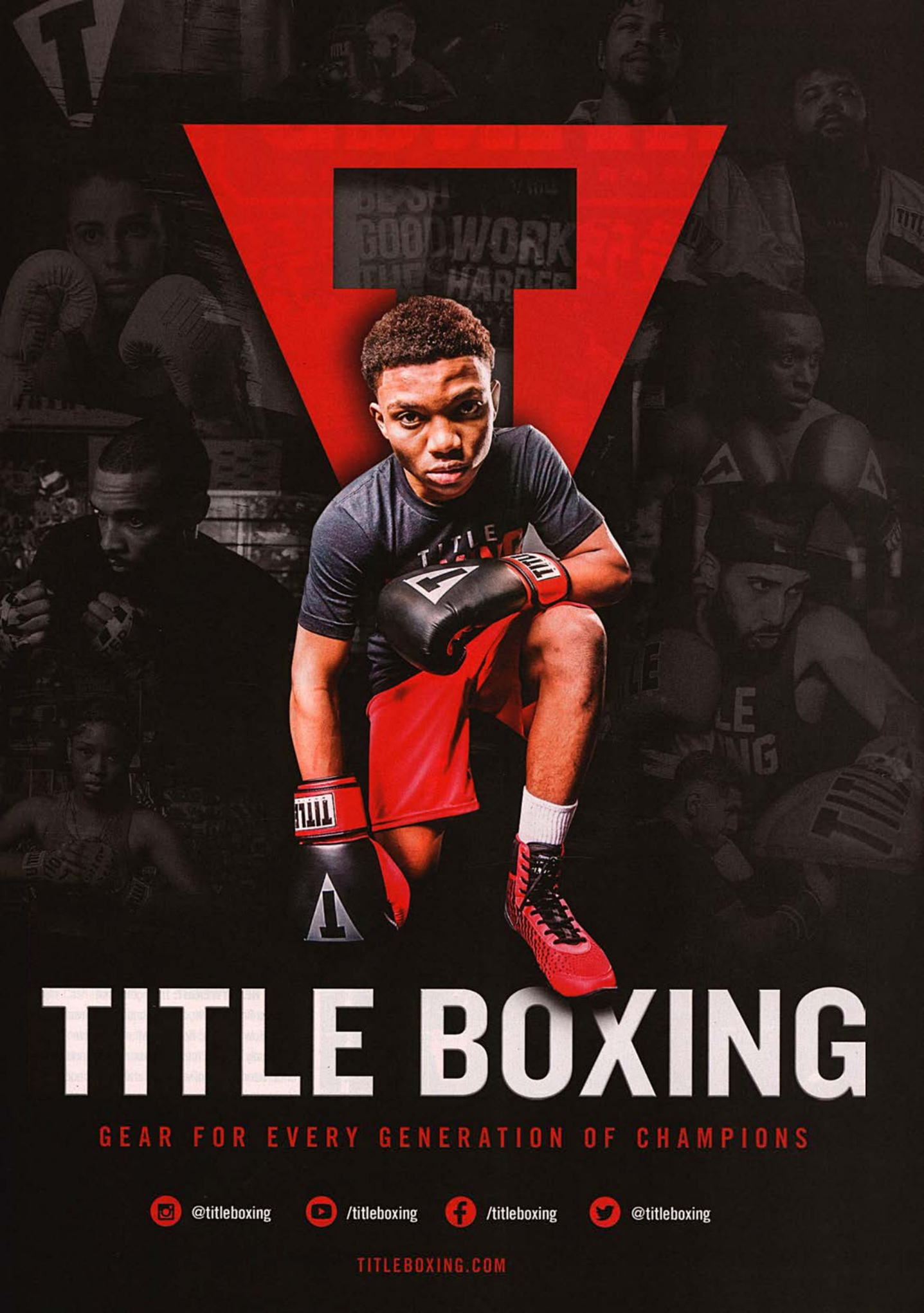
With just under a minute remaining in the 10th round, Charlo released a right to the body and a left hook that landed around the temple area. Following a delayed reaction, Castano's brain switched off all signals to his legs and he dropped to one knee involuntarily, a look of confusion etched across his face. The visitor was essentially finished by that point, but with everything that was on the line, he was allowed to continue. Charlo followed up furiously, punctuating a brutal four-piece combination with a head-snapping up-jab and a left hook to the body for the second knockdown. Referee Jerry Cantu stopped the contest without completing a count.

"This is legacy," said the 32-year-old Charlo during his post-fight interview with Showtime. "This was the fight of the year.

"I listened to my corner this time. I saw I was breaking him down. He was slowing down and I seen him crumble [when the hook landed]. I knew it was over."

Castano, also 32, can come again. He's still a major player at junior middleweight, but such was the nature of this defeat that any road to a championship would have to go around Charlo rather than through him. RING

Charlo showcased his championship quality by solving Castano the second time around.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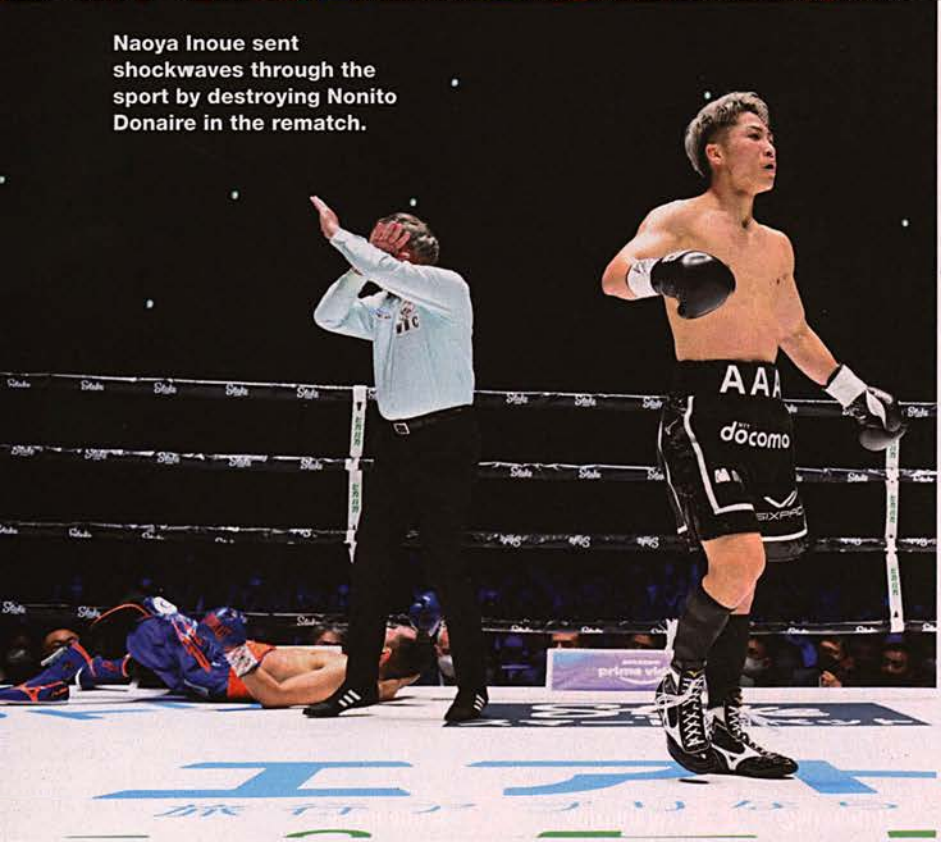
RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of June 18, 2022



Naoya Inoue sent shockwaves through the sport by destroying Nonito Donaire in the rematch.

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

CRUISERWEIGHT: After more than a year out of the ring, Aleksei Papin knocked out Dilan Prasovic in two rounds to remain at No. 5.

Richard Riakporhe also scored a second-round stoppage, against Fabio Turchi, and was elevated from No. 7 to No. 6.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: The hooks that Gilberto Ramirez (No. 5 last month) relentlessly dug below Dominic Boesel's left elbow were eventually too much for the overmatched and undersized German, who succumbed to a body shot in the fourth round. Ramirez moved up to No. 4.

The following week, Joshua Buatsi (No. 9 last month) ended his knockout streak at 10 but secured a close unanimous decision over fellow Brit Craig Richards (unrated), a crowd-pleasing performance that promoter Eddie Hearn

ABOVE: NAORI FURADA, THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

suggested could pave the way for Buatsi to face Canelo-conqueror Dmitry Bivol in London.

No. 5-rated Maxim Vlasov was then stopped by unrated Dilmurod Satybaldiev in six rounds and fell off the list, making room for the return of Jean Pascal at No. 10.

Artur Beterbiev kept his triple-digit knockout percentage intact with a two-round bludgeoning of Joe Smith Jr. (No. 3 at the time), putting the Long Islander on the canvas for the first time in his career and then doing it twice more before referee Harvey Dock stepped in. Beterbiev also held onto his No. 2 rating, but the Ratings Panel was temporarily deadlocked – with fervent debate – over whether the Russian-Canadian deserved to hop over Dmitry Bivol to No. 1. A major deciding factor was simply the scale of a victory over Smith as compared to one over Canelo Alvarez, which Bivol accomplished in May.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: No. 1-rated David Benavidez nearly ended David Lemieux's night with a beautiful counter left hook in the opening round, which would've been merciful, but Lemieux stuck around for another round and a half of abuse before his corner stepped in. The Canadian veteran dropped off the list from No. 6, making room for countryman Erik Bazinyan at No. 10.

Billy Joe Saunders (No. 3) has been out of action for more than a year and has no discernible irons in the fire, so he was dropped and undefeated Russian Vladimir Shishkin entered at No. 10.

Young David Morrell rose a notch to No. 7 after overwhelming and stopping Kalvin Henderson in four rounds.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: Zhanibek Alimkhanuly (No. 6 last month) wasn't especially challenged, but his clinical destruction of Danny Dignum by second-round KO scared the panel into giving him a one-rank promotion.

Erislandy Lara successfully completed his second mission at 160 pounds, dominating and stopping Spike O'Sullivan in eight rounds to replace Felix Cash at No. 10.

Jimmy Kelly (unrated) brought frenetic energy that troubled Jaime Munguia (No. 4) at first, but Munguia's power easily swayed the fight once he connected, which he did in Round 5 for three knockdowns and a referee intervention.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Their records are different and all the belts are now in one man's hands, but Jermell Charlo and Brian Castano didn't budge in the ratings after their rematch. Charlo proved he's worthy of the undisputed championship with a 10th-round stoppage, eclipsing the somewhat controversial split draw in July 2021. And the way in which Castano (still the No. 1 contender) eventually deflated to the canvas rather than fell spoke volumes of the effort he'd put in, clocking Charlo with plenty of blistering right hands as the champion chipped away at his foundation with hooks and jabs. We'll likely be talking about Round 5 when the year-end awards roll around.

Lara vacated his No. 4 seat to move up in weight, and No. 3-rated Jarrett Hurd was removed for inactivity, leaving two spaces at the bottom of the list. Michel Soro grabbed No. 9 and Carlos Ocampo slotted in at No. 10. Ocampo would defend that position a couple weeks later with a first-round knockout of Vicente Rodriguez (unrated).

WELTERWEIGHT: Jaron Ennis (No. 4 last month) moved up a notch after finishing Custio Clayton with an overhand right in the second round, finally locking in what has long seemed like the division's inevitable top three, along with Errol Spence Jr. (No. 1) and Terence Crawford (No. 2).

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Shohjahon Ergashev stayed busy with an eight-round decision over Luis Veron, maintaining his position at No. 7.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Undefeated Mexican William Zepeda got back into the ratings at No. 10 (replacing Gustavo Lemos) with a unanimous decision over Rene Alvarado, who has hit a skid of losses but remains a tough former junior lightweight titleholder and was in his first fight at 135.

Gervonta Davis took advantage of an ill-advised lunge by Rolando Romero, countered with a left cross flush on the cheek and was out the side door before Romero flopped forward onto the ropes. The sixth-round ending was flashy but didn't affect Tank's standing at No. 4.

More than 40,000 fans showed up in Melbourne to watch George Kambosos Jr. defend his titles, but Devin Haney calmly pissed on that parade, outboxing the Australian with a largely defensive but very effective performance to win the undisputed championship by wide unanimous decision. Thus Haney arose from No. 3 to usurp the throne and Kambosos, who has since activated his rematch clause, dropped to the No. 1 contender position.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: Jamel Herring (No. 2 last month) moved up to 135, where he lost a 10-round decision to Jamaine Ortiz (unrated), then announced his retirement soon afterward. His departure left room for Albert Bell at No. 10.

Joe Cordina (unrated last month) sort of came out of nowhere and scored a one-punch KO-of-the-year candidate for the IBF title – and stormed into the ratings at No. 5 – at the expense of Kenichi Ogawa, who slipped from No. 5 to No. 8 after the second-round loss. Cordina's arrival also put an end to Bell's brief tenure.

FEATHERWEIGHT: Two-time Olympic gold medalist Robeisy Ramirez was plastered with negative press when he lost his pro debut in 2019, but the Cuban has rebounded with a 10-fight win streak. His most recent was a fifth-round knockout of Abraham Nova, which got him into the ratings at No. 9 and pushed out No. 10-rated Michael Conlan.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Marlon Tapales stayed put at No. 9 with a second-round knockout of journeyman Jose Estrella.

Stephen Fulton (No. 1) was one point shy of a shutout over Daniel Roman, who slipped from No. 3 to No. 4 after being controlled in every category by the two-belt titleholder from Philly. A contest with Murodjon Akhmadaliev (No. 2) for the undisputed championship could be next.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Jason Moloney went from No. 4 to No. 3 with a stoppage of Aston Palicte, who was floored by a short right in the third round and then finished by the follow-up.

And the last man to beat Moloney? Division champ Naoya Inoue's "Monster" nickname checked out once again as he picked up another belt in his rematch with Nonito Donaire, scoring a brutal second-round knockout at the same arena in Saitama where Donaire rekindled his career with a closer-than-expected decision loss to Inoue in 2019. But that was then. Donaire fell from No. 1 to No. 3.

On the undercard, Naoya's younger brother, Takuma, outpointed Gakuya Furuhashi at 122 pounds, so he gave up his No. 5 rank at 118 and made room for Alejandro Santiago at No. 10.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: Andrew Moloney stopped Alexander Espinoza (unrated) in the second round to hold his position at No. 10.

FLYWEIGHT: Felix Alvarado landed at No. 10 after moving up from 108 pounds for a fourth-round knockout of Luis Hernandez (unrated).

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Alvarado gave up his spot at No. 2, which created a vacancy at No. 10 for Venezuela's Carlos Canizales.

RATINGS

Through fights of June 18, 2022

Division champion Hiroto Kyoguchi's eighth-round victory over Esteban Bermudez (No. 7 at the time) was messy – a few fouls, lots and lots of blood – but the Japanese fighter was relentlessly fierce on top of being more skilled than the Mexican, who dropped to No. 9.

POUND FOR POUND: Similar to last month, Ratings Panel members' inboxes overheated as the weekly debates were pulled into the parallel universe where weight classes don't exist.

The first panelist to address Charlo's victory suggested it was good but not sufficient to jump over Roman Gonzalez (No. 10 at the time). A second panelist, in disbelief, said it was bad enough that Charlo wasn't already on the list, but the idea that he wouldn't get in after becoming the 154-pound undisputed champion was "ludicrous." He suggested No. 7 for Jermell, adding, "It is our job to identify the best in the sport. Well, he has identified himself and made it clear."

Another member expressed reservations about Charlo because he was lucky to get a draw in the first fight against Castano. A fourth acknowledged the point but said, "Sure, having 'lost' his first fight against Castano is not a great look, but there are plenty of great fighters who only enhanced their legacy by getting it right the second time." Since it seemed like a good time to air any pent-up grievances, some wondered why the hell Lomachenko and Taylor were still on the list at all.

Then the managing editor, Mr. Gray, stepped up to the podium: "Answer is relatively simple here. Bring Jermell in and drop Chocolatito. We can't retain these great champions out of nostalgia. We did the same with Pacquiao, which was absolute ass, and should have learned our lesson." To avoid any further ass, this was the course taken.

Haney received some P4P love for his performance Down Under, and Fulton as well, but for now they are in the "not yet" category along with Jaron Ennis – emphasis on "yet," as their potential is as plain as day.

Beterbiev's name also came up, but he didn't initially make the cut. His golden ticket to the No. 10 slot was the ousting of Juan Francisco Estrada (No. 5), who has been inactive since March 2021. (For now, Estrada still holds the Ring belt at 115 pounds, partly because division champions are typically given more time to schedule a fight. There was also some sentiment on the panel that his win over Chocolatito in March 2021 was a bit of a gift and that he doesn't look right on the pound-for-pound list.)

But the man of the pound-for-pound hour was Inoue, who went into the Donaire rematch sitting at No. 3. After the result, the question was only whether he would rise to No. 2 or No. 1, above Oleksandr Usyk.

One panelist pretty well summed up the decision to elevate "Monster" all the way to the top, making him the first Japanese fighter to do so: "As much as I admire and respect what Usyk has accomplished on the road, it's hard for me not to think Inoue is actually the best fighter in the world right now." RING

P4P

1	**NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
2	**OLEKSANDR USYK** Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
3	**TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
4	**ERROL SPENCE JR.** U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
5	**CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 57-2-2 (39 KOs)
6	**VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
7	**DMITRY BIVOL** Russia • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
8	**JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
9	**JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
10	**ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	**TYSON FURY** RING, WBC U.K. • 32-0-1 (23 KOs)
1	**OLEKSANDR USYK** IBF, WBA, WBO Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
2	**ANTHONY JOSHUA** U.K. • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
3	**DEONTAY WILDER** U.S. • 42-2-1 (41 KOs)
4	**JOSEPH PARKER** New Zealand • 30-2-0 (21 KOs)
5	**DILLIAN WHYTE** U.K. • 28-3-0 (19 KOs)
6	**ANDY RUIZ JR.** U.S. • 34-2-0 (22 KOs)
7	**LUIS ORTIZ** Cuba • 33-2-0 (28 KOs)
8	**JOE JOYCE** U.K. • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
9	**FILIP HRGOVIC** Croatia • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
10	**FRANK SANCHEZ** Cuba • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	**MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF Latvia • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
1	**YUNIEL DORTICOS** Cuba • 25-2-0 (23 KOs)
2	**LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO U.K. • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
3	**ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC Congo • 29-2-0 (25 KOs)
4	**THABISO MCHUNU** S. Africa • 23-6-0 (13 KOs)
5	**ALEKSEI PAPIN** Russia • 14-1-0 (13 KOs)
6	**RICHARD RIAKPORHE** U.K. • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
7	**MATEUSZ MASTERNAK** Poland • 46-5-0 (31 KOs)
8	**CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH** U.K. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
9	**RYAD MERHY** Belgium • 30-1-0 (25 KOs)
10	**NOEL GEVOR** Germany • 26-2-0 (11 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**
1	**DMITRY BIVOL** WBA Russia • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
2	**ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC, WBO Russia • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
3	**GILBERTO RAMIREZ** Mexico • 44-0-0 (30 KOs)
4	**CALLUM SMITH** U.K. • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
5	**MARCUS BROWNE** U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
6	**JOE SMITH JR.** U.S. • 28-4-0 (22 KOs)
7	**JOSHUA BUATSI** U.K. • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
8	**ANTHONY YARDE** U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
9	**MATHIEU BAUDERLIQUE** France • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)
10	**JEAN PASCAL** Canada • 36-6-1 (20 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	**CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO Mexico • 57-2-2 (39 KOs)
1	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ** U.S. • 26-0-0 (23 KOs)
2	**CALEB PLANT** U.S. • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)
3	**ANTHONY DIRRELL** U.S. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)
4	**JOHN RYDER** U.K. • 31-5-0 (17 KOs)
5	**CHRISTIAN MBILLI** France • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)
6	**ZACH PARKER** U.K. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
7	**DAVID MORRELL** Cuba • 7-0-0 (6 KOs)
8	**LERRONE RICHARDS** U.K. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
9	**ERIK BAZINYAN** Canada • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
10	**VLADIMIR SHISHKIN** Russia • 13-0-0 (8 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of June 18, 2022

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF, WBA
  Kazakhstan • 42-1-1 (37 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 40-0-0 (32 KOs)
- **5** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **6** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **7** **RYOTA MURATA**
  Japan • 16-3-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **CARLOS ADAMES**
  Dom. Rep. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

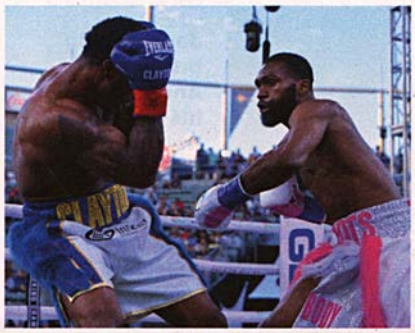
- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **1** **BRIAN CASTANO**
  Argentina • 17-1-2 (12 KOs)
- **2** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 19-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **3** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (21 KOs)
- **5** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **MAGOMED KURBANOV**
  Russia • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **LIAM SMITH**
  U.K. • 31-3-1 (18 KOs)
- **8** **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **9** **MICHEL SORO**
  France • 35-3-1 (24 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS OCAMPO**
  Mexico • 34-1-0 (22 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
- **3** **JARON ENNIS**
  U.S. • 29-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **YORDENIS UGAS**
  Cuba • 27-5-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
  Lithuania • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 30-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **8** **DAVID AVANESYAN**
  Russia • 29-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **9** **CONOR BENN**
  U.K. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RADZHAB BUTAEV**
  Russia • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 27-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **2** **JOSE RAMIREZ**
  U.S. • 27-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **JACK CATTERALL**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
  Puerto Rico • 18-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **7** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **8** **BATYR AKHMEDOV**
  Russia • 9-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **9** **GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **SANDOR MARTIN**
  Spain • 40-2-0 (13 KOs)



Jaron Ennis moved up to the No. 3 spot at 147 pounds courtesy of a quick and ruthless second-round knockout of unrated Custio Clayton.

Stephen Fulton retained his No. 1 position at 122 pounds by posting a virtual shutout over former titleholder Daniel Roman, who dropped to No. 4.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **DEVIN HANEY** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **1** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 20-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
  U.S. • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **GERVONTA DAVIS**
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **5** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 22-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 23-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 32-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-4-0 (27 KOs)
- **9** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 37-3-1 (26 KOs)
- **10** **WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
  Mexico • 26-0-0 (23 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** RING, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **OSCAR VALDEZ**
  Mexico • 30-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **2** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 16-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **3** **ROGER GUTIERREZ** WBA
  Venezuela • 26-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **4** **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
  Brazil • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **5** **JOE CORDINA** IBF
  U.K. • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
  U.S. • 19-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **HECTOR GARCIA**
  Dom. Rep. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **KENICHI OGAWA**
  Japan • 26-2-1 (18 KOs)
- **9** **SAMIR ZIANI**
  France • 33-3-1 (8 KOs)
- **10** **EDUARDO RAMIREZ**
  Mexico • 27-2-3 (12 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 35-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **MARK MAGSAYO** WBC
  Phil. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 24-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **JOSH WARRINGTON** IBF
  U.K. • 31-1-1 (8 KOs)
- **5** **LEIGH WOOD** WBA
  U.K. • 26-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **GARY RUSSELL JR.**
  U.S. • 31-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **7** **KIKO MARTINEZ**
  Spain • 43-11-2 (30 KOs)
- **8** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 28-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **9** **ROBEISY RAMIREZ**
  Cuba • 10-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **10** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 25-2-0 (15 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 22-1-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 29-4-1 (10 KOs)
- **5** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **RA'EESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 21-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **MARLON TAPALES**
  Phil. • 36-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **10** **LUIS NERY**
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (24 KOs)

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BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
  Japan • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
- 1 **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO**
  Phil. • 31-4-0 (21 KOs)
- 2 **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 24-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 3 **NONITO DONAIRE**
  Phil. • 42-7-0 (28 KOs)
- 4 **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
  U.S. • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
- 6 **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 7 **LEE MCGREGOR**
  U.K. • 11-0-1 (9 KOs)
- 8 **VINCENT ASTROLABIO**
  Phil. • 17-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **PAUL BUTLER** WBO
  U.K. • 34-2-0 (15 KOs)
- 10 **ALEJANDRO SANTIAGO**
  Mexico • 25-3-5 (13 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- C **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBA
  Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- 1 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 50-5-1 (43 KOs)
- 2 **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 51-3-0 (41 KOs)
- 3 **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 28-2-0 (15 KOs)
- 4 **FERNANDO MARTINEZ** IBF
  Argentina • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 18-1-2 (8 KOs)
- 6 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 7 **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 35-5-1 (25 KOs)
- 8 **JERWIN ANCAJAS**
  Phil. • 33-2-2 (22 KOs)
- 9 **DONNIE NIETES**
  Phil. • 43-1-6 (23 KOs)
- 10 **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 2 **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 18-2-0 (14 KOs)
- 3 **SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (4 KOs)
- 4 **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 5 **RICARDO SANDOVAL**
  U.S. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 6 **MORUTI MTHALANE**
  S. Africa • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- 7 **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **ANGEL AYALA LARDIZABAL**
  Mexico • 14-0-0 (6 KOs)
- 9 **JACKSON CHAUKE**
  S. Africa • 20-1-2 (14 KOs)
- 10 **FELIX ALVARADO**
  Nicaragua • 38-2-0 (33 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- C **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 1 **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
  Japan • 19-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 2 **JONATHAN GONZALEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 25-3-1 (14 KOs)
- 3 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 4 **ELWIN SOTO**
  Mexico • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 33-4-0 (10 KOs)
- 6 **MASAMICHI YABUKI**
  Japan • 13-4-0 (12 KOs)
- 7 **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 12-0-2 (6 KOs)
- 8 **SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA**
  S. Africa • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 9 **ESTEBAN BERMUDEZ**
  Mexico • 14-4-2 (10 KOs)
- 10 **CARLOS CANIZALES**
  Venezuela • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)

Jason Moloney advanced one spot to No. 3 in the 118-pound ratings by dropping and stopping unrated Aston Palicte in three rounds.

Jason's twin brother, Andrew, held his position at No. 10 in the 115-pound division by halting unrated Alexander Espinoza in two.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 2 **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 38-1-0 (23 KOs)
- 3 **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 55-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 4 **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI** WBO
  Japan • 16-3-0 (11 KOs)
- 5 **WILFREDO MENDEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 17-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 6 **RENE MARK CUARTO** IBF
  Phil. • 20-2-2 (11 KOs)
- 7 **PEDRO TADURAN**
  Phil. • 14-4-1 (11 KOs)
- 8 **GINJIRO SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 7-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 9 **ERICK ROSA**
  Dom. Rep. • 5-0-0 (1 KO)
- 10 **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 21-5-0 (11 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of June 18, 2022

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 21-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)

4 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)

5 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)

6 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 47-3-0 (19 KOs)

7 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)

8 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)

9 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 8-1-0 (2 KOs)
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS**
Sweden • 8-1-0 (4 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 28-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-1-1 (11 KOs)
4 **SHADASIA GREEN**
U.S. • 9-0-0 (8 KOs)
5 **JANINA NEUMANN**
Germany • 5-0-0 (5 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL** WBO
U.K. • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 28-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-1-1 (11 KOs)
4 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 12-4-0 (5 KOs)
5 **RAQUEL MILLER**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 18-1-0 (1 KO)
2 **PATRICIA BERGHULT** WBC
Sweden • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 **HANNAH RANKIN** WBA
U.K. • 12-5-0 (3 KOs)
4 **NATASHA JONAS** WBO
U.K. • 11-2-1 (8 KOs)
5 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-7-0 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 45-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 23-7-0 (0 KOs)
4 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 **EWA PIATKOWSKA**
Poland • 16-1-0 (4 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **CHANTELLE CAMERON** RING, IBF, WBC
U.K. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 27-5-0 (10 KOs)
2 **KALI REIS** WBA, WBO
U.S. • 19-7-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MARY MCGEE**
U.S. • 27-4-0 (15 KOs)
4 **OSHIN DERIEUW**
Belgium • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
5 **JESSICA CAMARA**
Canada • 8-3-0 (0 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Ireland • 21-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)
2 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 47-3-0 (19 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 10-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 14-2-0 (5 KOs)
5 **TERRI HARPER**
U.K. • 12-1-1 (6 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **MIKAELA MAYER** RING, IBF, WBO
U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 47-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** WBC
U.S. • 12-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE**
France • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN**
U.S. • 18-5-1 (1 KO)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)
2 **ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ** WBA
Mexico • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 41-11-2 (19 KOs)
5 **ELINA TISSEN**
Germany • 25-2-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 39-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **DINA THORSLUND**
Denmark • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE** WBO
France • 16-0-0 (1 KO)
4 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **MAUREEN SHEA**
U.S. • 30-2-1 (13 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 24-3-1 (4 KOs)
3 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-11-4 (19 KOs)
4 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 53-4-2 (30 KOs)
5 **MELISSA ODDESSA PARKER**
U.S. • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 34-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 19-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 32-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 25-4-1 (4 KOs)
5 **TAMAO OZAWA** WBO
Japan • 17-5-2 (6 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **MARLEN ESPARZA** RING, WBA, WBC
U.S. • 12-1-0 (1 KOs)
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA**
Japan • 19-3-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 31-3-2 (11 KOs)
3 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 24-1-0 (10 KOs)
4 **GABRIELA ALANIZ**
Argentina • 13-0-0 (5 KOs)
5 **IBETH ZAMORA**
Mexico • 32-7-0 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF, WBO
Argentina • 16-0-1 (6 KOs)
3 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **TSUNAMI TENKAI**
Japan • 28-13-1 (16 KOs)
5 **JESSICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 28-2-0 (3 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 25-2-0 (9 KOs)
3 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 11-0-1 (3 KOs)
4 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-5-0 (4 KOs)
5 **SARAH BORMANN**
Germany • 14-0-0 (7 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 17-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **AYAKA MIYAO** IBF
Japan • 25-9-2 (6 KOs)
4 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-1-1 (1 KO)
5 **NANAE SUZUKI** WBO
Japan • 11-4-1 (1 KO)

THE WORLD'S
HEAVYWEIGHT
CHAMPIONSHIP
FIGHT
PATTERSON
PONY
PONY
TOP-WEAR

TALE OF THE TAPE

The Oscar De La Hoya Chronology

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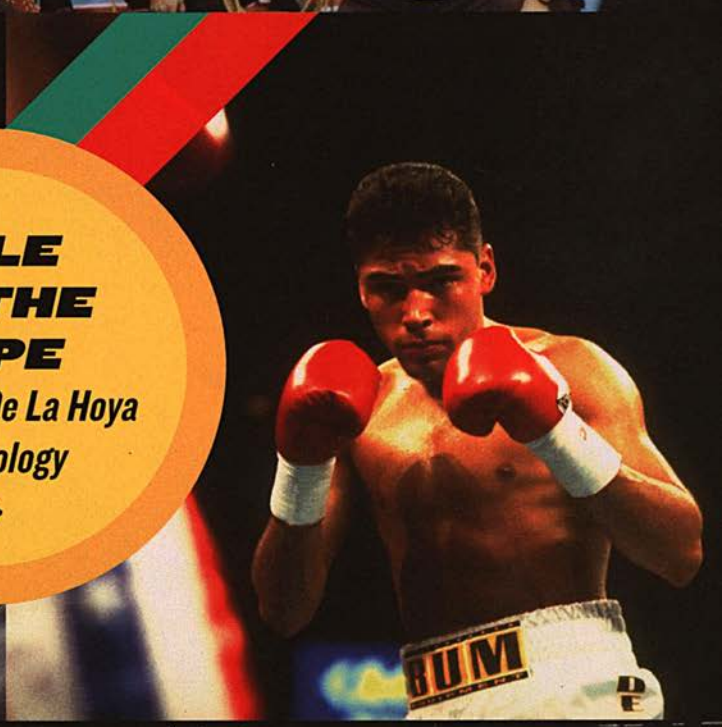
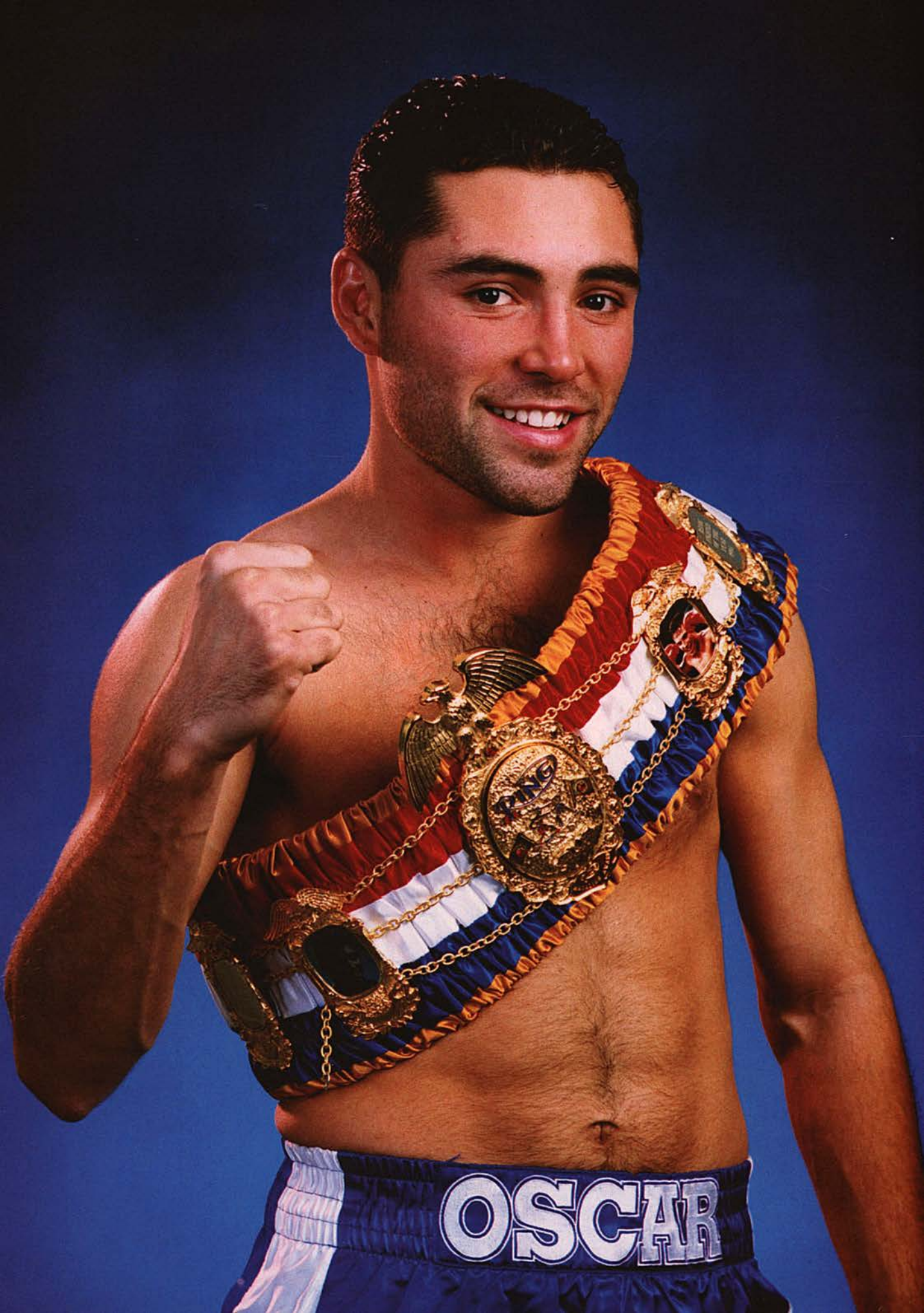


Oscar De La Hoya faced the best fighters of multiple weight classes during the 1990s/2000s, earning uncommon crossover appeal.


OSCAR

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

NOT YET A SUPERSTAR BUT CERTAINLY ON HIS WAY, DE LA HOYA CLIMBED TO THE TOP OF THE LIGHTWEIGHT DIVISION AND ENTERED THE POUND-FOR-POUND DISCUSSION WITH FOUR IMPRESSIVE VICTORIES IN 1995

BY **ROBERT MORALES**

One vicious left hook was the highlight of a 1995 that saw Oscar De La Hoya go 4-0 and be named Fighter of the Year by The Ring Magazine. It landed on the jaw of Rafael Ruelas in their lightweight title-unification fight, which ended with a second-round TKO for De La Hoya at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

"I went in there for the kill. I went in there to finish him. I went in there because he was on wobbly legs, and so I just finished the fight," De La Hoya said during a recent interview. The May 6 fight took place less than three years after he won the gold medal at the 1992 Barcelona Games.

By this time, it was clear that De La Hoya was the real deal. A monster, even.

He began the year with a 12-round victory over tough John John Molina on February 18 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. After the victory over Ruelas less than three months later, De La Hoya shattered the nose of Genaro "Chicanito" Hernandez, which was apparently already broken ahead of the fight, and stopped him after six rounds on September 9 at Caesars Palace. De La Hoya capped the campaign with a stoppage of Jesse James Leija after two rounds on December 15 at Madison Square Garden.

"The fight with Ruelas was his first big pay-per-view, and Hernandez was a very experienced former world champion," said Top Rank Inc. honcho Bob Arum, De La Hoya's promoter then. "The Molina bout was essential in his development because it showed he could go 12 hard rounds with a world-class fighter.

"Oscar was on his way to becoming the sport's biggest superstar, which was our goal when we signed him coming out of the Barcelona Olympics. He was a truly special talent."

DE LA HOYA VS. MOLINA

De La Hoya made the third successful defense of his WBO lightweight title when he defeated Molina by scores of 117-110, 116-111 and 116-111. He decked Molina with a left-right

2/18/95
De La Hoya beat John John Molina by UD

in the first round, but Molina had his moments as well, particularly in the middle rounds.

"I remember it being the first real tough test for me under [trainer] Robert Alcazar," said De La Hoya, 49. "Yeah, it was a real tough fight and it went the distance. It was a war."

De La Hoya by then had to be brimming with self-assurance. He knew the boxing world was watching his every move and every punch in every fight because he was the kid from East L.A. who won a gold medal less than two years after his mother, Cecilia, died from breast cancer.

De La Hoya knew what was happening around him, that's for sure, as in the post-fight news conference he told reporters that everyone knew if they were to beat him, "it would lift their careers up to the stars."

A reporter stood up and asked De La Hoya where he gets his modesty.

Indeed, the die was cast for a storied career.

DE LA HOYA VS. RUELAS

De La Hoya and Ruelas both trained in Big Bear, California. When they squared off, De La Hoya was 17-0 and Ruelas was 43-1. Ruelas, from Mexico by way of Sylmar, California, won the IBF lightweight title in stirring fashion when he got up from two first-round knockdowns to defeat Freddie Pendleton via unanimous decision in February 1994 at the Great Western Forum in Inglewood, California.

Also, Ruelas had 33 knockouts going in, so there was no shortage of power. But once that left hook connected on his chin in the second round, it was all over in De La Hoya's mind.

"I already knew that was it," he said. "I mean, I studied Rafael left and right, especially that Pendleton fight. One thing about Rafael is that if I didn't get him before three or four rounds, then I knew it was going to be a long night for me because Rafael, he's a tough guy.

5/6/95
De La Hoya stopped Rafael Ruelas in the second round.

"He tends to warm up the first two, three, four rounds. But once he warms up, there's no stopping him. So when I dropped him, I knew he was going to get back up. I knew he was shaky. But I knew he was going to get back up."

Ruelas recalls that night like it was yesterday, instead of 27 years ago. He started with a joke during a recent interview.

"Yeah, if he were still around the same weight, I'd ask for a rematch. But he's gained quite a bit of weight," Ruelas said, laughing.

Seriously, though, Ruelas knew the enormity of the bout.

"I know that it was a big fight and he was very popular because of the gold medal and being undefeated and because of the guys he had already defeated up until that point," Ruelas said. "So that gave him a lot of, I guess, put a lot of pressure on his side."

Ruelas believes he shared that burden.

"But it put a lot of pressure on me as well, because I certainly didn't want to lose to somebody who didn't have a

lot of fights, who hadn't been fighting in the pros for that long," Ruelas said. "But I knew that he was a real good fighter, because I had already faced him as kids in the amateurs and also in sparring."

Ruelas wasn't complaining, but to this day he wishes referee Richard Steele would have allowed him to continue. Considering Ruelas' wherewithal against Pendleton, that's understandable.

But after the initial knockdown, De La Hoya flattened Ruelas again with a right not long after Ruelas rose. Ruelas again got to his feet, but Steele stopped it after De La Hoya continued the assault.

"At this point, I look back and what happened, happened," Ruelas said. "I have to accept that it happened. Had they not stopped it, obviously, things would have been different. How different is not certain. I do believe that it would have been a much more competitive and longer fight.

"I was in real good shape, but I may have overtrained. I know that my legs were not there from the beginning. The balance was not, you know ... I don't know if it was the weight I lost; I was also having difficulty with weight. But it is what it is."

The first thing Ruelas' trainer, Joe Goossen, remembers is what happened in the semi-main event. Gabe Ruelas, Rafael's brother, stopped Jimmy Garcia in the 11th round of their WBC junior lightweight title fight. Garcia died 13 days later from his injuries.

Goossen trained both brothers.

"Gabriel fought before Rafael and it really put a pall over the locker room, I've gotta tell you," Goossen said. "It was a bad way to start the evening, so that's the first thing I think of whenever I think of that fight."

As for De La Hoya-Rafael Ruelas, Goossen said he wonders how it might have turned out "had a few things progressed." But he would not take a thing away from De La Hoya.

"De La Hoya was at his best in that year, probably," Goossen said. "You know, '95, '96, '97, he was almost unstoppable. He was really in his prime. He was one of the most skilled fighters in his era."

This was De La Hoya's biggest victory to that point. It bolstered his spirit.

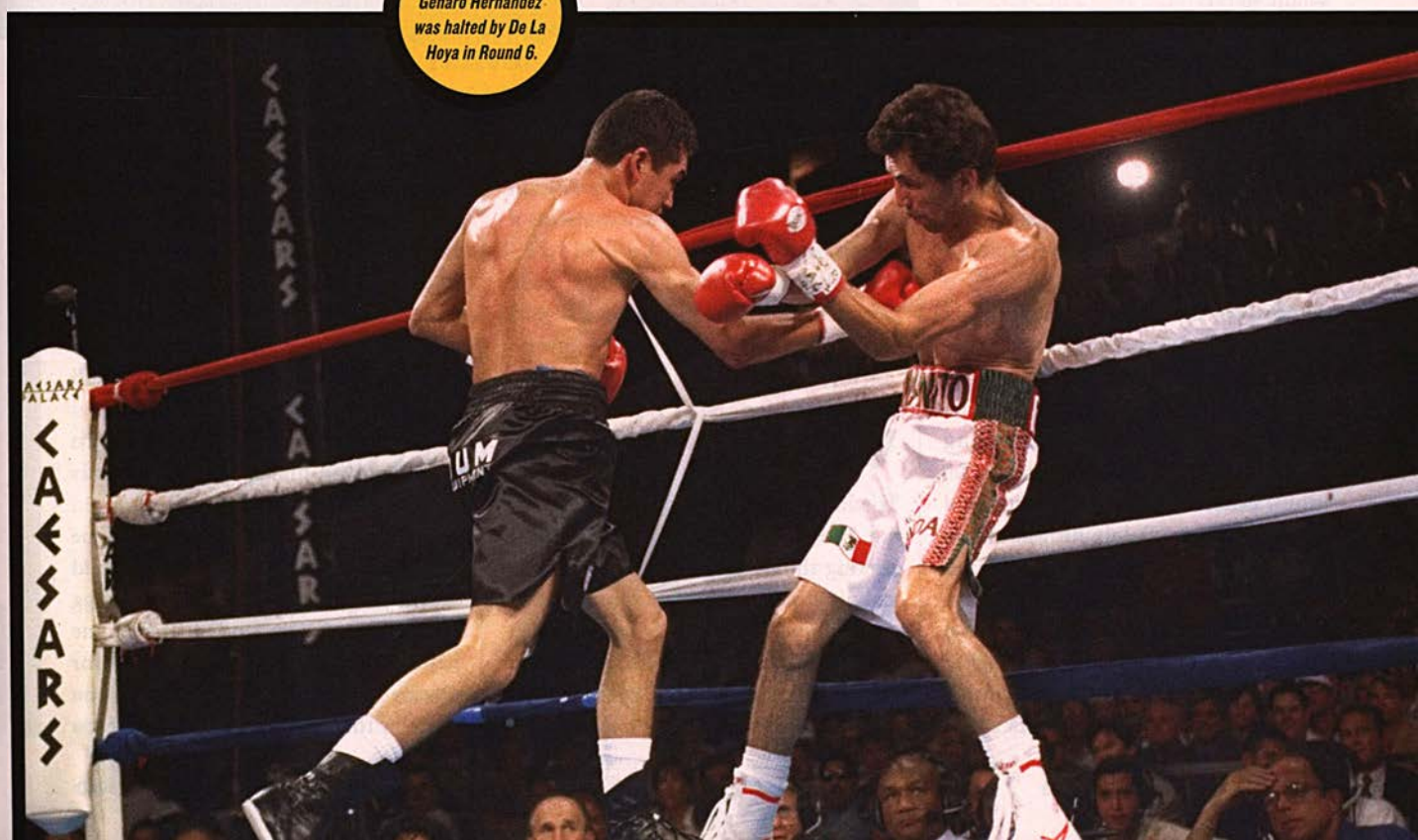
"Yeah, a lot, because the way I set him up," De La Hoya said. "I believe the game plan for the first time worked. We were specifically training to push him off with the shoulder and get him off-balance. So that gave me all the confidence in the world. It showed me that I can set punches up and set combinations up and set a game plan up."

Seconds after De La Hoya's fourth successful defense of his WBO lightweight title, commentator Larry Merchant declared, "Talent tells."

De La Hoya also took Ruelas' IBF title that night but relinquished it after the IBF ordered De La Hoya to fight its mandatory challenger at the time – Miguel Julio. De La Hoya then agreed to fight Chicanito Hernandez, a much bigger name and much better promotion than a fight with Julio would have been.

DE LA HOYA VS. HERNANDEZ

Hall of Fame publicist Bill Caplan worked this lightweight championship bout for Top Rank. He recalls the lead-up to the fight.



9/9/95
Genaro Hernandez was halted by De La Hoya in Round 6.

STEPHEN DUNN

"It was one East L.A. high school versus the other East L.A. high school; it was Garfield versus Roosevelt," Caplan said.

De La Hoya went to Garfield High, Hernandez to Roosevelt High – though not at the same time. The schools make up one of the nation's biggest rivalries, and their football game every year draws crowds of up to 25,000 at East L.A. College, though it has been played a few times at the L.A. Coliseum. It is aptly dubbed The East L.A. Classic and has been contested since 1925.

"When we had our press conference, it was at the East L.A. College stadium and the schools participated," Caplan said. "Not only the students, but they had the Folklorico dancers and all kinds of traditional stuff. It was a very, very colorful celebration."

De La Hoya ended up being the one who celebrated in the ring by stopping Hernandez after six rounds.

However, there was some concern on De La Hoya's part before he got Hernandez out of there. He said that as he was sitting on his stool between either the fourth and fifth rounds or fifth and sixth, he felt a pinch in his sciatic nerve.

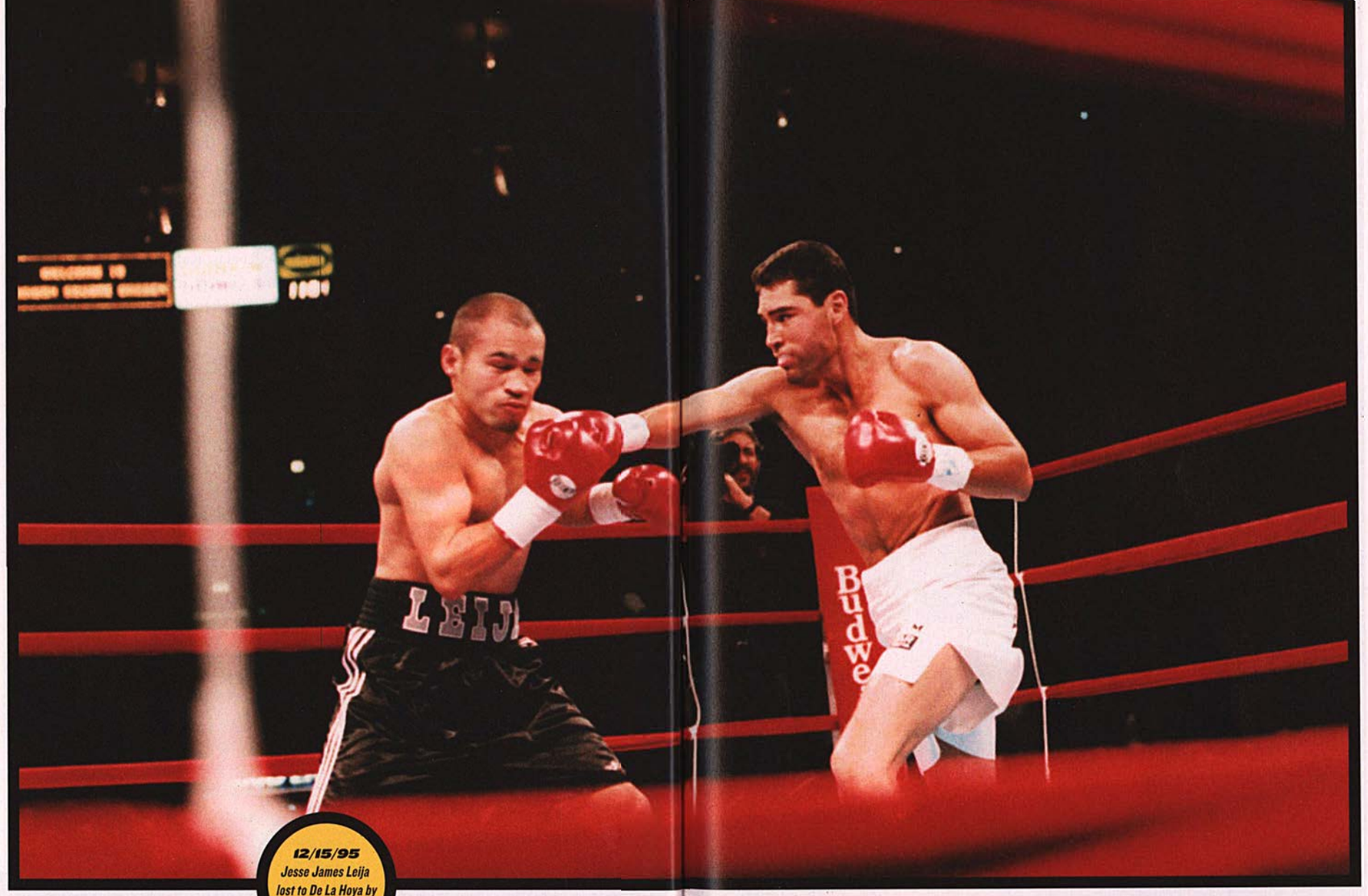
"And I couldn't stand up because it was so painful," he said. "I didn't understand what the hell it was at the time.

"I try to stand up and I'm like, 'Oh, shit, this doesn't feel right.' And so I had to stay down kind of crouched over throughout the whole round. So that's when I told myself, 'I have to come in for the kill, because my back, I can't stand up correctly.'"

De La Hoya landed several uppercuts during the fight. One was likely responsible for shattering Hernandez's nose. Bleeding from the injury after the sixth, Chicanito told referee Richard Steele he was done. Many reports since have indicated that Hernandez's nose was broken or damaged during a sparring session with Shane Mosley prior to the fight.

"Yeah, Chicanito at the time I believe was undefeated," De La Hoya said of Hernandez, who entered 32-0-1. "You know, tough guy, lanky, strong puncher. I was actually his sparring partner in my amateur days, so I knew it was a tough fight."

Sadly, Hernandez lost his battle with cancer in 2011 at the age of 45.



12/15/95
Jesse James Leija lost to De La Hoya by TKO in Round 2.

DE LA HOYA VS. LEIJA

It was December 15 of 1995. De La Hoya was on a roll. He was among the pound-for-pound best. To culminate the year, he made his debut at the famed Madison Square Garden in New York City, where so many big-name boxers before him displayed their fighting wares.

It didn't last long, as Leija's corner stopped the fight after two rounds of watching their guy take a lot of punishment. De La Hoya, who again defended his title, floored Leija with a left hook with 51 seconds remaining in the second round. Leija stayed on a knee and took just about a nine-count, got up and was decked again by a right-left combination with seconds left.

Saved by the bell, Leija began to walk back to his corner. But he was rickety, and that was that.

"I knew he was in a different league just because of the power," Leija said recently. "I mean, I had been training [with] great 147-pounders at the time just because I was getting ready for Oscar. I was in top shape, but when I got in there, it was a different type of power.

"I tell people – think about this – he knocked guys out at 130, 135, 140, 147, 154 and 160. Can you imagine how hard he hit at 135? He was a beast, man."

De La Hoya won titles in six weight classes. Contrary to what Leija said, he didn't actually knock anyone out in his two fights at middleweight (160), but he did stop opponents inside the distance in the other five weight classes, from junior lightweight to junior middleweight.

Told of Leija's assessment of him, De La Hoya was not shy about agreeing.

"Yeah, I felt I had a lot of power for that weight class," he said. "I felt very strong, I felt energetic, light on my toes, so I felt that nobody could beat me in that weight class."

Lestor Bedford, Leija's longtime manager, sized up De La Hoya at lightweight.

"He was basically unbeatable at 135," Bedford said. "It was by far his best, most dominant weight. James fought great fights with Kostya Tszyu, Shane Mosley and beat Azumah [Nelson] twice [in three fights]. Looking back, James had no chance against Oscar. Just a huge size and, especially, speed difference."

De La Hoya was 5-foot-10½. Leija stood about 5-5.

Interestingly, both boxers considered that fight a big moment in their careers.

"Think about this," Leija said. "How many people get a chance to fight at Madison Square Garden? And we brought boxing back at Madison Square Garden. It was a huge fight, man. So when people ask me, 'What's one of your most important fights?' I'm saying that fight with Oscar is one of them. It's one of those rewarding fights for me, even though it went, what, three rounds or whatever."

De La Hoya says it's "pretty cool" that Leija has that in his heart of hearts.

"Fighting for the first time at the Garden, it kind of solidified the star power that I had," De La Hoya said. "Not only on the West Coast, but globally. Obviously it comes from the Olympics.

"But fighting Leija, you have a Texas vato and an East L.A. vato filling up the arena in New York. I mean, we were both in awe. It was awesome. It was great. It was probably one of my most defined moments in my entire career."

SUMMING UP 1995

De La Hoya called the year one of the top four high points of his Hall of Fame career. He scoffs at anyone who might think it was anything less than stellar because three of the four victories came over fighters moving up from 130 not long before.

Molina and Hernandez were in their first fight at 135, and Hernandez weighed 131 in his previous bout. Leija was officially in his third fight at lightweight, because in his previous two he weighed 133½ and 133 pounds.

De La Hoya is quick to note that he, too, moved up from 130. When he won the junior lightweight title by stopping Jimmi Bredahl after 10 rounds at the Olympic Auditorium in March 1994, he weighed in at just 128¾ pounds.

He fought his last fight at junior lightweight against Giorgio Campanella in May 1994 and was in his fourth lightweight fight when he took on Molina.

Besides, De La Hoya said of his four 1995 opponents, "The talent speaks for itself."

CULTURE CLASH

AS **DE LA HOYA'S** RISE CONTINUED, FANS OF **JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ** DEMANDED THAT EAST L.A.'S "GOLDEN BOY" BE PUT TO THE TEST AGAINST MEXICO'S GREATEST WARRIOR

By **David A. Avila**

A small crowd of maybe a dozen people waited under sunny skies for their fast-food orders of burritos and tacos at Lupe's 12 Kinds of Burritos in East L.A. Some standing, others sitting on the red barstools as the aroma of fresh-cooked refried beans drifted in the air.

The owner of Lupe's Burritos, Adeline "Tuchie" Portillo, often talked about sports, especially the Dodgers or Garfield High Bulldogs. On some days, a small television in the back of the popular restaurant would be turned on to a game.

It was April 1996, and word was quickly spreading of the match made between Mexico's great Julio Cesar Chavez and the young local kid Oscar De La Hoya. Top Rank had announced a deal was made and the two would meet at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas on June 7. Posters were published and quickly grabbed by the public.

"Did you hear about Julio Cesar Chavez fighting De La Hoya?" said one guy in his early 30s wearing a company uniform at the East L.A. eatery.

"He's going to get his ass kicked," another guy in a blue T-shirt said. "He's not Mexican."

"And what are you?" said Tuchie defiantly.

"Well, Mexican," claimed the blue T-shirt guy.

"Don't talk about Oscar, or you can get your Mexican ass out of here," said Tuchie. She was a big fan of De La Hoya, who attended Garfield High and Griffith Jr. High, located two blocks away from her restaurant. She was even mentioned in an L.A. Times story along with a photo of her when De La Hoya was about to fight Rafael Ruelas.

Chavez, a Mexican citizen, had fought numerous times at the Olympic Auditorium since his debut at that venue in 1983. And whenever he fought in Las Vegas, thousands from Southern California would drive to see him at the casino city.

De La Hoya was an Olympic hero who won gold at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. As a professional, he had won titles at junior lightweight and lightweight and was targeting the junior welterweight division that Chavez ruled. He was seen by fickle fans as a fraud, though they couldn't really explain why.

Fans of boxing all over the Southwest were split between those siding with Chavez and those siding with De La Hoya. There were many reasons for the debate aside from boxing skill. On one side, many women preferred De La Hoya, the young East L.A. kid with movie star looks. On the other side was Chavez, the hero to millions of Mexicans living in the U.S. and those living in Mexico.

Both sides were passionate.

East L.A. had long been a home for descendants of the Mexican Revolution and before that for Russians, Jews, Asians and other immigrants. Beginning in the 1980s, turbulence in Central America had sparked more immigration into the U.S. and especially toward the unincorporated area known as East Los Angeles.

Chavez fans saw the rivalry as a test of Mexican authenticity.

AL BELLO

CULTURE CLASH

CHICANOS

During the late 1960s, a politically charged movement ignited by Mexican Americans began, and they chose to call themselves "Chicanos."

It was a political and social statement, a warning shot to all others that they recognize their differences and similarities. And their willingness to fight for their rights wherever necessary. Even in the prize ring.

By the early 1990s, Chicanos were beginning to thrive and succeed in every field. Even at the high schools, students were beginning to gain entry into universities like UCLA, USC, Loyola University and the Cal State universities. Students at Garfield High had caused a stir when many of them passed a California state calculus test. They were suspected of cheating and were forced to take the test again. They passed. A 1988 movie was made about the accusations, called *Stand and Deliver*, starring Edward James Olmos. It was right after this Hollywood film that De La Hoya entered the same Garfield High.

East Los Angeles had produced boxers in both the amateurs and professional ranks beginning in the early 1890s. The very first world champion of Mexican heritage was not from Mexico, but from Los Angeles, and his name was Solomon Garcia Smith. Others from East L.A. would follow, like Richie Lemos and Joey Olivo.

De La Hoya began boxing before he was 10. By the time he won Olympic gold, he had amassed more than 200 matches nationally and internationally.

As a professional, the East L.A. boxer did not waste time and willingly accepted bouts against foes with winning records. In just his fifth fight, he faced Jeff Mayweather, the uncle of Floyd "Money" Mayweather, and stopped him in four rounds. Three months later, De La Hoya stopped Troy Dorsey in the first round. Dorsey was a former IBF featherweight titleholder who had battled the world-class likes of Jorge Paez and Tom Johnson in hotly contested bouts. Early the next year, De La Hoya would defeat Jimmi Bredahl for the WBO junior lightweight title. It was the first of many.

6/7/96
De La Hoya beat Julio Cesar Chavez by TKO in Round 4.

For the next two years, De La Hoya would campaign in the lightweight division, knocking off other Chicano and Mexican fighters like Rafael Ruelas, Genaro "Chicanito" Hernandez and Paez. After gathering both the WBO and IBF lightweight world titles, he decided to go after Mexico's king, Chavez, who was considered boxing's best pound-for-pound fighter by many between 1990 and 1993.

When the fight was announced, fans quickly began forming sides on who to back. Most Mexican-born and second-generation residents sided with Chavez while many Chicano residents and English-speaking Latinos preferred De La Hoya.

MEXICAN KING VS. CHICANO UPSTART

Whether you preferred Chavez and his hunter-killer approach or De La Hoya's boxer-puncher style, the technical matchup was inconsequential. When two fighters of Mexican heritage clash, it's about machismo, and Chavez was seen as the ultimate macho by most boxing aficionados.

De La Hoya was portrayed by many Chavez followers as the opposite of macho. He was the "pretty boy" who was expected to cower when confronted face-to-face in the prize ring against Chavez. It was the common slur passed around barrios in L.A.

Every time the East L.A. fighter would win a bout, some excuse was given by detractors who would immediately claim, well, he can't beat this guy or that guy. When De La Hoya knocked out Ruelas, detractors said he couldn't beat Rafael's talented brother Gabe Ruelas. And when he demanded a fight with Chavez, fans of the Mexican fighter were ecstatic. Finally the moment when Mexico's best would unravel the phony De La Hoya, was the common sentiment.

When June 7 arrived, the hottest ticket in Las Vegas was to see Chavez versus De La Hoya at Caesars Palace. The constructed outdoor stadium was expected to fill every seat, but few were prepared for the intense heat. Temperatures soared past 120 degrees that day.

Fans from Mexico arrived in massive numbers. Many wore red headbands with Chavez's name emblazoned in gold. Hotels were packed with Mexican supporters wearing large gold chains, short-skirted girlfriends in tow. Not all had reservations, but one man wearing expensive jeans pulled out a wad of cash and offered it to a hotel clerk at the Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino.

Outside the arena, fans gathered looking to purchase tickets.

When Eric "Butterbean" Esch entered the arena to fight George Clarke in the first bout, the outdoor stadium seats were empty. Most of the fans looked for shade to avoid the searing heat.

It was a very good boxing card put on by Top Rank and featured many future stars who at the time were largely unknown. Diego "Chico" Corrales, Johnny Tapia and Erik "El Terrible" Morales were all winners on the card. Though it looked like the seats were still empty, many fans were hiding in the shadows.

As the blazing sun sank and darkness slowly arrived, the temperatures dropped to the low 100s by the time De La Hoya and Chavez entered the arena with the crowds roaring their approval.

Fans were mostly in favor of Chavez as the fighters were announced. Both pugilists looked serious and in tip-top condition. De La Hoya looked tanned and unshaven like the Marlboro Man commercials. Chavez was glum and angry as if insulted that anyone thought the East L.A. fighter could be any better than his 96 previous victims.

In the center of the prize ring, referee Joe Cortez instructed both fighters about the rules. De La Hoya was the taller and younger fighter and did not look anyone in the eye. Chavez had nearly 100 fights of experience and appeared irritated but physically fit and ready for action.

At the sound of the bell, both circled each other with caution and alertness. De La Hoya in particular seemed anxious to see Chavez's intentions. The De La Hoya jab shot out and Chavez shot his own retaliatory jab. A quick combination by De La Hoya, including a right to the head, opened up a cut on the side of Chavez's left eye. Quickly it began to bleed heavily, and Chavez pawed at it. Then he opened up with his own combination and was met by De La Hoya's double hook to the body and head.

The sight of a bleeding Chavez sent murmurs through the crowd. Suddenly thoughts of Chavez manhandling the pretty boy were gone. Now the crowd was sure Chavez would step up the tempo and punish the young upstart Chicano fighter. At the sound of the bell, some in the crowd began shouting in unison, "Chavez! Chavez!"

Chavez's corner cleaned up the blood from his face and he looked brand new. He came out aggressively in Round 2 and was met by several of De La Hoya's ripping jabs. Then Chavez unloaded a combination and was met by another from De La Hoya. Once again the blood began to flow on the Mexican fighter's face. Shouts of "Mexico! Mexico!" cascaded throughout the outdoor stadium. De La Hoya was in control and waiting for a Chavez attack.

The third round saw De La Hoya connecting quickly with a right cross. He followed it up with four lightning jabs up and down. Chavez worked his way in and caught De La Hoya with a sneaky left uppercut. No effect. Many in the crowd were surprised at the East L.A. fighter's dominance. It was very unexpected by the pro-Chavez fans. The De La Hoya fans sensed their fighter had taken control and a buzz could be heard.

A worrisome look crossed Chavez's face in his corner, as if knowing he had only a single bullet remaining in the chamber.

Chavez opened up the fourth more aggressively than any other round. He shot the same left uppercut and followed with a right. Immediately, De La Hoya opened up with his own combination. Then he followed it with more than a dozen blows up and

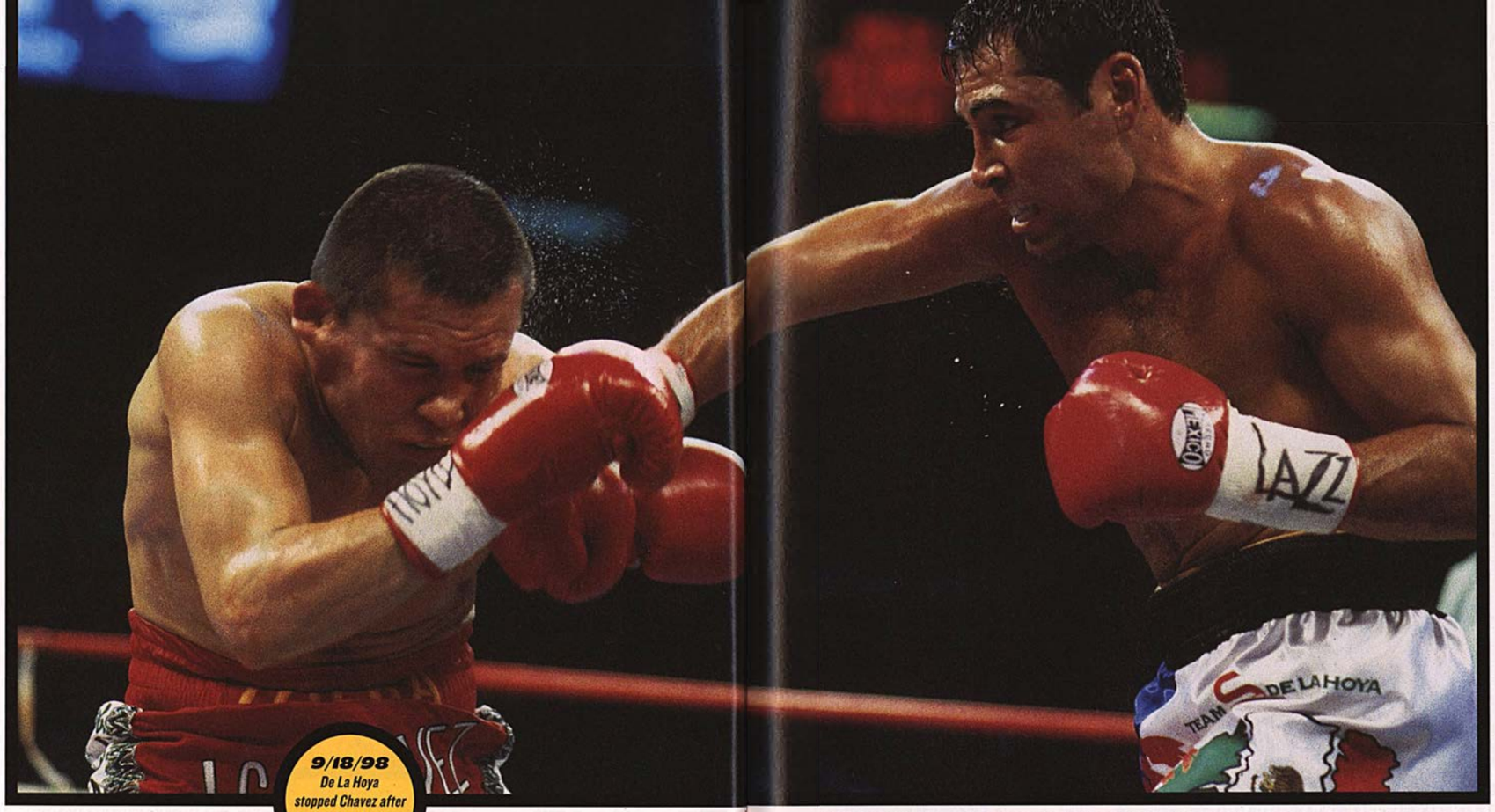
down. When De La Hoya was finished firing, Chavez bled from the eye and from the nose. He looked beaten. The referee signaled for the ringside doctor, who took a look and advised that the fight be stopped at 2:37 of the fourth round.

De La Hoya was the new WBC junior welterweight champion and now had his third division world title.

Arguments and fights erupted throughout the stadium between followers of De La Hoya and Chavez. Near the entrance, soda cups and beers were sent flying with liquid spraying innocent bystanders. Police converged quickly, but not before punches were exchanged between groups of fans.

It was later revealed that Chavez had suffered a cut during sparring sessions but did not want to cancel the fight. That same cut was opened up by De La Hoya the first time he connected with a punch. This fact would be used later to gain a rematch.

That became the mantra for Chavez fans: "De La Hoya didn't beat Chavez; a sparring partner did it." That was also the theme coming out of Chavez's dressing room.



9/18/98
De La Hoya stopped Chavez after eight rounds in their rematch

BATTLE AT THOMAS & MACK CENTER

It took two years, but it made sense for two of boxing's biggest stars to meet again in the prize ring. De La Hoya had conquered Mexico's other elite slugger, Miguel Angel Gonzalez, then Pernell Whitaker, David Kamau, Hector Camacho, Wilfredo Rivera and Patrick Charpentier. He was selling out arenas but kept hearing that he was ducking Chavez.

Little known to most fans at the time was that De La Hoya liked challenges.

The rematch with Chavez took place on September 18, 1998, at the indoor Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas. This time, the heat would not be a large factor in the fight. And this time, the two warriors of Mexican blood would be fighting as welterweights with De La Hoya defending the WBC 147-pound title. In this fight, Chavez would have a new trainer in Romulo Quirarte.

De La Hoya was a huge favorite, and in place of Jesus "El Profesor" Rivero in his corner, he had trainer Robert Alcazar with Gil Clancy as an adviser.

Chavez did not charge into battle as in their first engagement. He took a round to study the distance and timing of the East L.A. fighter who had won every round two years earlier. It proved beneficial.

As a welterweight, De La Hoya looked stronger and bigger than Chavez and far more confident. He had absorbed Chavez's blows, scarce as they were, in the first fight. In their second fight, it would also entice a far more aggressive battle.

Their second fight began like their initial meeting, with De La Hoya shooting out jabs and moving around. Very few blows were exchanged in the opening round.

The second round saw Chavez retaliating with jabs too, and it seemed to surprise De La Hoya. A three-punch Chavez combination was countered by a De La Hoya right uppercut and a lightning combo. Both viciously exchanged until the end of the round. De La Hoya hit his trunks with his fists to signify he wanted more as he returned to his corner.

Already the two fighters had exchanged more powerful blows than they had in their first encounter. Each connected with big shots and neither was affected.

Chavez opened the third round with a low blow and De La Hoya immediately complained and admonished his foe. Chavez fisted an apology to De La Hoya and the fight resumed. Left hooks connected for Chavez, who found De La Hoya willing to meet him toe-to-toe. It was perhaps Chavez's best round in both fights.

Though he could have duplicated their first fight by fighting from the outside, De La Hoya was choosing to engage in furious exchanges with the pressure-fighting Chavez.

V.J. LOVERO

Fans loved it.

Feeling the moment, Chavez opened up the fourth round with more aggression and landed a left hook, then blasted De La Hoya with a right cross flush on the jaw. The East L.A. fighter countered with his own right, double jabs and three lightning body shots. Chavez ended the round with a left hook and jab. The fifth round was more of the same. Each was getting their licks in and neither showed pain. Fans were going crazy from the action. Both fighters showed their ability to withstand big blows.

Chavez seemed confident yet still cautious. He had connected with his best shots, but De La Hoya was unfazed and had not slowed an iota. In the seventh round, after Chavez clocked De La Hoya with a one-two combo and then a lead right, the East L.A. fighter countered with his right and then unloaded a sizzling five-punch combination, including uppercuts.

Fans were on the edge of their seats, expecting more fury. De La Hoya opened the eighth round with a flush left uppercut and followed up with a six-punch combination. Chavez retaliated with a right uppercut and his own four-punch combination. Both exchanged furiously in the center of the ring, De La Hoya connecting with another left uppercut and a few punches after the bell. Chavez was furious at the late blows as he walked toward his own corner.

Chavez had blood dripping from his mouth, and when inspected by the trainer and ringside physician it was discovered the Mexican warrior's tongue was nearly split in half. After some discussion, the fight was waved over by referee Richard Steele. De La Hoya was again the winner by knockout. At the time, De La Hoya was the only fighter able to claim wins over Chavez by stoppage. Later, Kostya Tszyu and Grover Wiley would also score knockout wins over the Mexican great.

"He deserves my respect," said Chavez after the fight. "He is fast. He is a great fighter."

Fans of Chavez were mortified that once again their hero was unable to finish the fight. This had never happened before, and against the Chicano fighter De La Hoya it occurred twice. Fights erupted outside the arena and spilled into the Las Vegas Strip hours later.

Around 1 a.m. in front of the Caesars Palace entrance, a group of Chavez fans and De La Hoya fans were squaring off. Words were being exchanged when suddenly a car arrived and out stepped Chavez. Both groups of squabbling fans stopped and approached the Mexican warrior to ask what happened.

Chavez showed the ugly cut on his tongue to the six or seven fans and apologized for not being able to continue. All the fans patted him on the back or shook his hand and all walked away in different directions.

After the win, De La Hoya felt he had gained satisfaction.

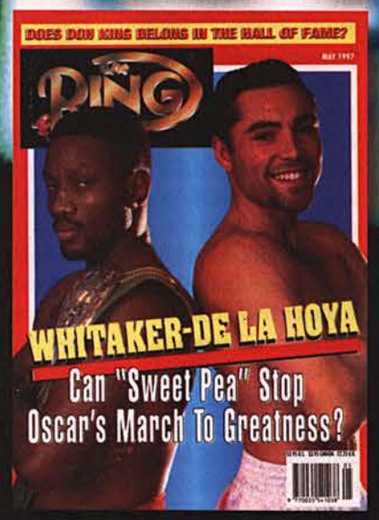
"He told me, 'You beat me,'" De La Hoya said of Chavez's words after the fight. "He's such a warrior."

Back in East L.A., no one was happier than Tuchie at Lupe's burrito stand. A local kid had succeeded, and that was a good reason to put a photo of De La Hoya on her little shelf of champions next to a photo of the Los Angeles Dodgers and a Garfield Bulldog stuffed animal.

Gyms in East L.A. seemed busier, and soon more boxing gyms were opening up all over Southern California. The impact of De La Hoya's success resulted in an explosion of new boxing clubs all over, from Oxnard to San Diego. The number of gyms changed from maybe two dozen gyms to more than 100 Southern California boxing gyms in the next 20 years.

Suddenly every Latino kid in the Southland had dreams of becoming the next Golden Boy or next Julio Cesar Chavez. It didn't matter if you were Mexican, Chicano or any other ethnicity, boxing could lead to riches or fame.

WELTER SKELTER



DE LA HOYA'S MOVE TO 147 POUNDS DURING A FIVE-FIGHT RUN IN 1997 WOULD CEMENT HIS STATUS AS THE STAR HE WAS ALWAYS EXPECTED TO BECOME

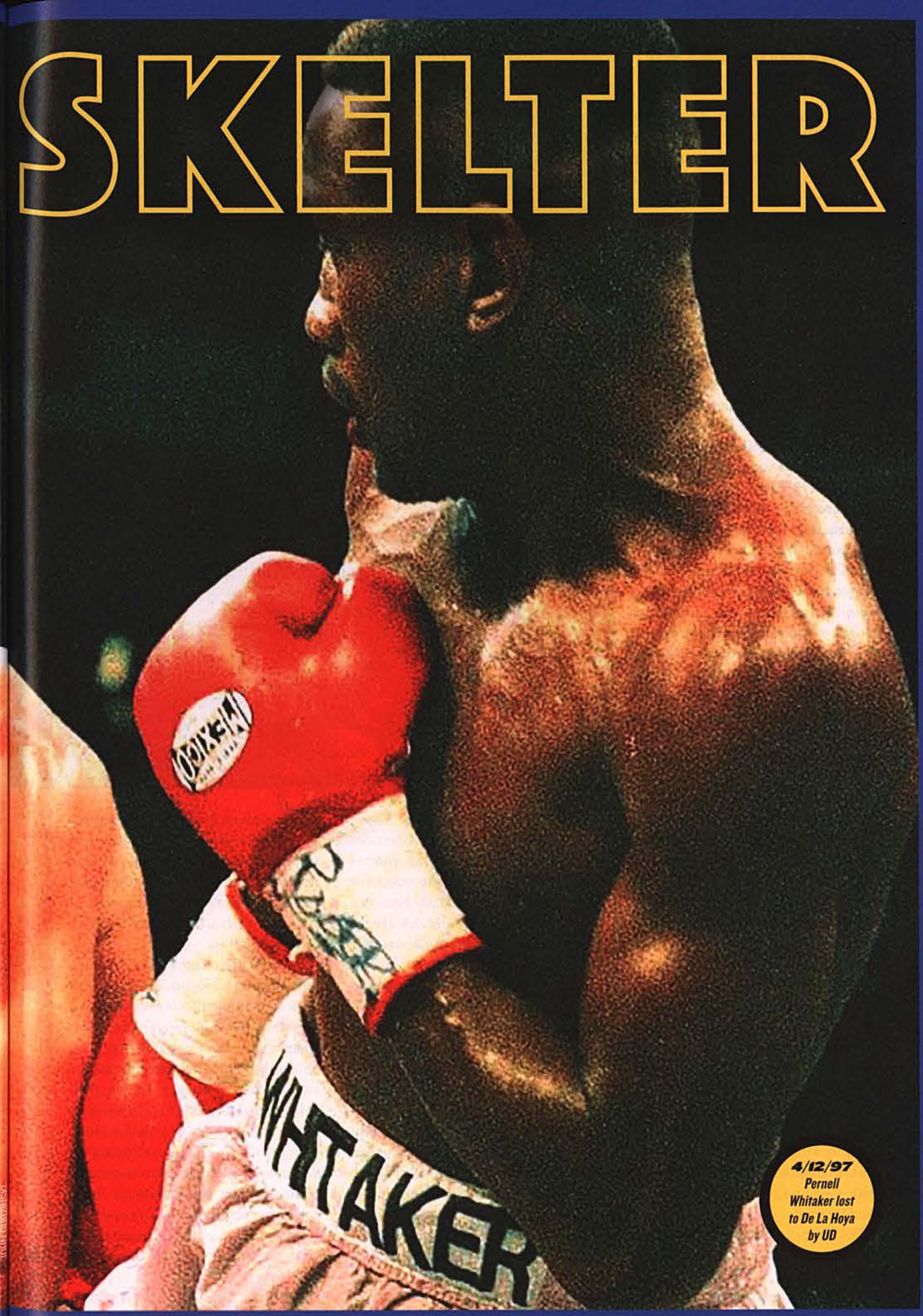
By **Cliff Rold**

Sometimes, honesty can bite back.

Even if it really is the truth.

On the eve of Oscar De La Hoya's move to welterweight to challenge WBC and lineal welterweight king Pernell Whitaker, "The Golden Boy" was asked if the judges might favor him against one of the aging greats of the sport. De La Hoya gave USA Today an honest reply.

"I think so. Unfortunately, that's



4/12/97
Pernell Whitaker lost to De La Hoya by UD

boxing ... It's all politics, it's all about money. What the WBC sees is that I'm a young fighter. If I win the title, I obviously make more money than Whitaker or anybody else."

Entering 1997, the hope throughout the sport of De La Hoya becoming a sort of Sugar Ray Leonard 2.0 was coming to pass. De La Hoya had seized the torch from Mexican icon Julio Cesar Chavez as the new lead star of the lighter weight classes in 1996. Affiliated with HBO, De La Hoya's rising star gave the network a fresh face to build around while Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield were affiliated with Showtime.

De La Hoya would engage in five fights in 1997, four of them on pay-per-view, cementing his place as the biggest non-heavyweight draw in the game. The biggest of those pay-per-view outings would give Oscar a chance to knock off his second living legend in less than a year. It didn't go as well as the win over Chavez in the ring but did little to stop his ascension as a star.

Before he got there, De La Hoya opened the year on January 18 against a fighter who had once been labeled as a potential heir to Chavez. Mexico's Miguel Angel Gonzalez was undefeated at 41-0. From 1992-1995, Gonzalez reigned as WBC lightweight titleholder and made 10 defenses (in addition to a pair of non-title fights) before a move to junior welterweight, where he would challenge De La Hoya for the WBC crown.

De La Hoya decisively handed Gonzalez his first defeat. Mark Jacobs wrote for The Ring, "The Gonzalez fight proved an entertaining, if mostly one-sided, tune-up. From the start, De La Hoya ... dominated with a wicked jab, popping the punch into the center of Gonzalez's face and repeatedly snapping back the Mexican's head." Gonzalez would lose two points on fouls in a fight where he won only the third, ninth and 10th on the cards with two judges calling the 11th round even.

The business of the bout was pretty good for a tune-up, capturing nearly 350,000 buys.

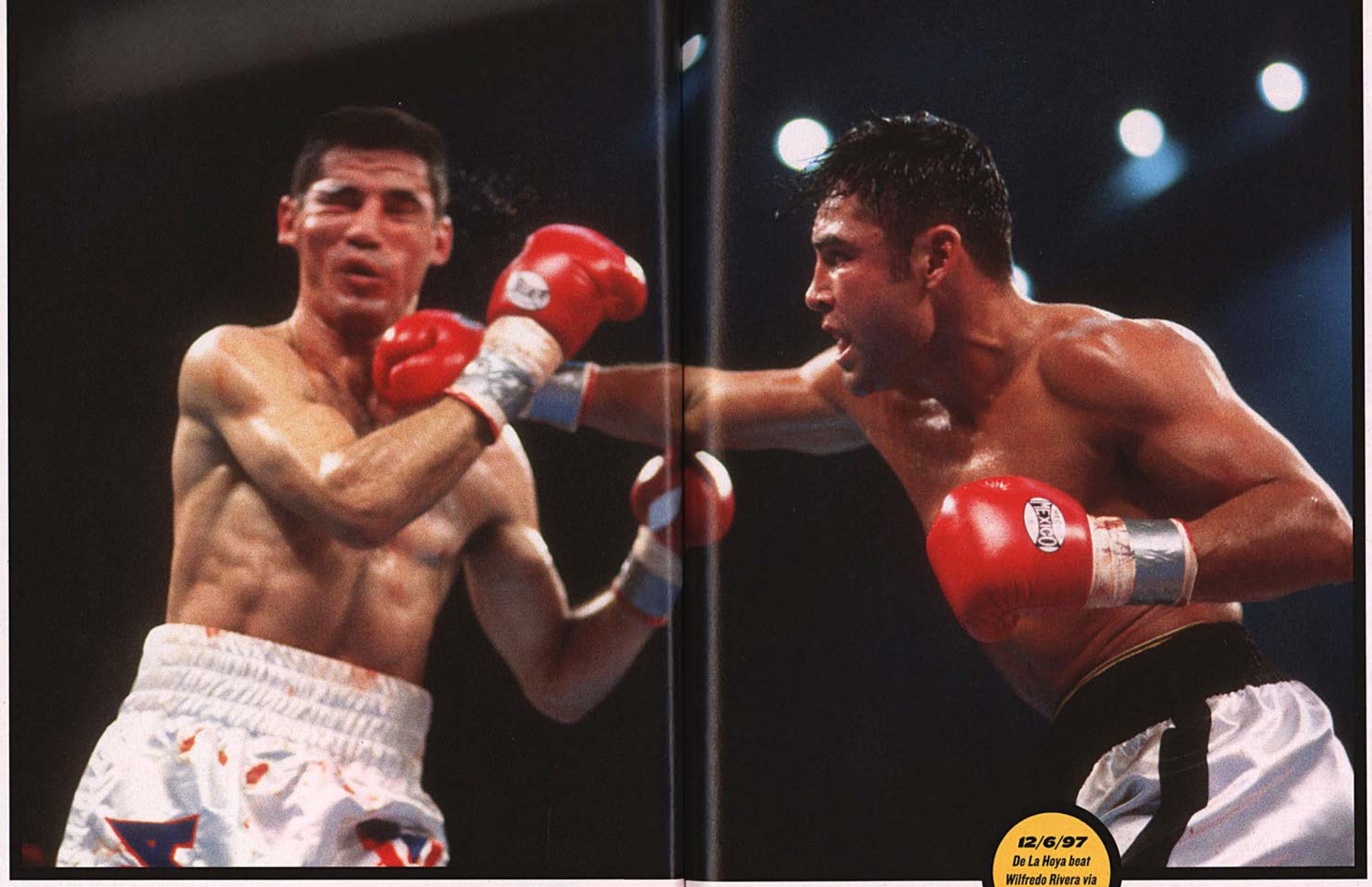
De La Hoya's win over Gonzalez ended his brief run at junior welterweight and set the stage for another showdown with boxing's old guard elite. But De La Hoya-Whitaker almost died on the launchpad six days later.

"Sweet Pea" had shown signs of decline in 1996, struggling in two bouts with tough Wilfredo Rivera. It was nothing compared to the drama when Whitaker squared off with unheralded challenger Diosbelys Hurtado.

Fighting with no fear, Hurtado was quicker and more explosive than Whitaker early. The Cuban dropped Whitaker moments into the first and then again in the sixth, building a lead on all three scorecards entering the 11th round. In a finish reminiscent of Jake LaMotta-Laurent Dauthuille II, Whitaker found a ferocious assault when he needed it. The defensive wizard pummeled Hurtado into submission to save his title and a significant payday with The Golden Boy.

The Hurtado fight raised serious questions. At 33, did Whitaker still have it in him to tackle the youth and firepower of De La Hoya? There was a superfight in place to find out.

"Superfight" is a reference to the event more than the action that followed on April 12, 1997. The styles of Whitaker and De La Hoya didn't generate explosions, though it was a fascinating technical encounter. Whitaker lost a point under WBC rules for a cut caused by an accidental butt, a rule since discontinued in the United States. De La Hoya suffered an awkward but official knockdown in the ninth.



12/6/97
De La Hoya beat Wilfredo Rivera via eighth-round TKO.

Between those moments, Whitaker got the better of the statistical battle by outlanding De La Hoya 232-191 on the night, according to CompuBox. Of Whitaker's scored blows, 160 were jabs while De La Hoya's total included only 45 leads. There were several moments in the bout where De La Hoya would flurry frantically and find nothing but the air around Sweet Pea. Missing for those who preferred De La Hoya's aggression was substantial return fire from Whitaker.

Was De La Hoya's aggression effective? Could the scoring components of defense and ring generalship decide a contest where offense felt fleeting? The judges came in unanimously for De La Hoya. Opinion beyond their pencils was split.

Debate about the outcome started as soon as the scores were read. It remains a debated finish to this day among fight aficionados. ESPN covered the fight live by providing viewers who had not purchased the pay-per-view with their unofficial scoring between rounds. It's a feature some networks used to provide on big fight nights in another era. ESPN scoring favored Whitaker.

The HBO commentary team was split throughout the night, with Jim Lampley favoring De La Hoya's work while Larry Merchant and Roy Jones seemed to like the work of Whitaker.

Most saw a close fight. The judges did not at 116-110 twice and 115-111. Notably, Whitaker's only winning round on all three scorecards in the second half of the fight came in the ninth by way of the aforementioned awkward, uninjurious knockdown in the frame.

Scoring of some key rounds, notably the first and 11th rounds, raised eyebrows. Whitaker got the nod from only one judge in each frame. According to the live CompuBox tallies on the broadcast, Whitaker outlanded De La Hoya 17-11 in the round and drew blood from De La Hoya's nose. Discussing the fight for an in-studio replay on HBO, Merchant opined, "If Pernell Whitaker didn't win that first round from all of the three judges, or later the 11th round, I think we know that going into the fight, for whatever reasons – reasons of style, reasons of glamour – [Whitaker] had to win that fight by a knockout."

Those who favored Whitaker on the night probably couldn't help but factor the sentiments De La Hoya voiced prior to the fight. ... *It's all politics, it's all about the money.* Unrealistically lopsided scores in favor of De La Hoya fueled cynicism among those who scored the bout for Whitaker.

Writing for Sports Illustrated, Richard Hoffer reasoned that "it required the heightened paranoia of boxing writers and commentators to suggest that the victory was the result of a conspiracy or, for that matter, anything but the natural forces that replace old with young, traditional with modern. The fight was close, without conclusive volleys, and probably featured a little more of Whitaker's exaggerated sense of artfulness than anybody needed (and a lot less of De La Hoya's firepower than everybody else wanted). The bout was certainly not a 9-3 or a 9-2-1 affair, which is how two of the Nevada judges scored it (the third had it 8-4, also for De La Hoya), but neither was it robbery. It was just a tough fight that De La Hoya won, barely."

Or lost, barely.

It depended who one asked. It

still does. Ring Magazine's post-fight coverage, provided by Steve Farhood, favored Whitaker 114-113, as did a rough majority of ringside reporters. Bernard Fernandez, writing for sister publication KO, favored De La Hoya 115-113.

Writing for International Boxing Digest, the legendary Budd Schulberg may have summed it up best: "Ringsiders who consider themselves experts in the arcane art of judging a contest of fisticuffs will be arguing the round-by-round scoring of their bout until both those performers with 180-degree contrasting styles are ready for their Social Security benefits well into the next century. No one truly knows who won this anticlimactic, sometimes lackluster but technically interesting engagement."

Schulberg acknowledged, in judging the fight from home, he narrowly favored De La Hoya the first time but preferred Whitaker by a hair when he watched it again the next day. It was the sort of fight that could make even seasoned eyes debate themselves.

Regardless of the action in the ring, the bout was a financial windfall, generating over 700,000 pay-per-view buys. De La Hoya said he would take a rematch. It never came to pass, with promoter Bob Arum referring to it as a "stinking fight" in the aftermath. There was other business to do, and the De La Hoya express remained on the rails. Activity against more favorable styles was there to act as a salve against any lingering controversy.

Boxing media was ready to embrace The Golden Boy regardless. De La Hoya moved to No. 1 in the Ring and KO Magazine pound-for-pound lists off the Whitaker win, passing by Roy Jones, and would remain there until his narrow loss to Felix Trinidad in 1999. De La Hoya finished first in KO's annual "best of the best" media poll for all of 1997 as well.

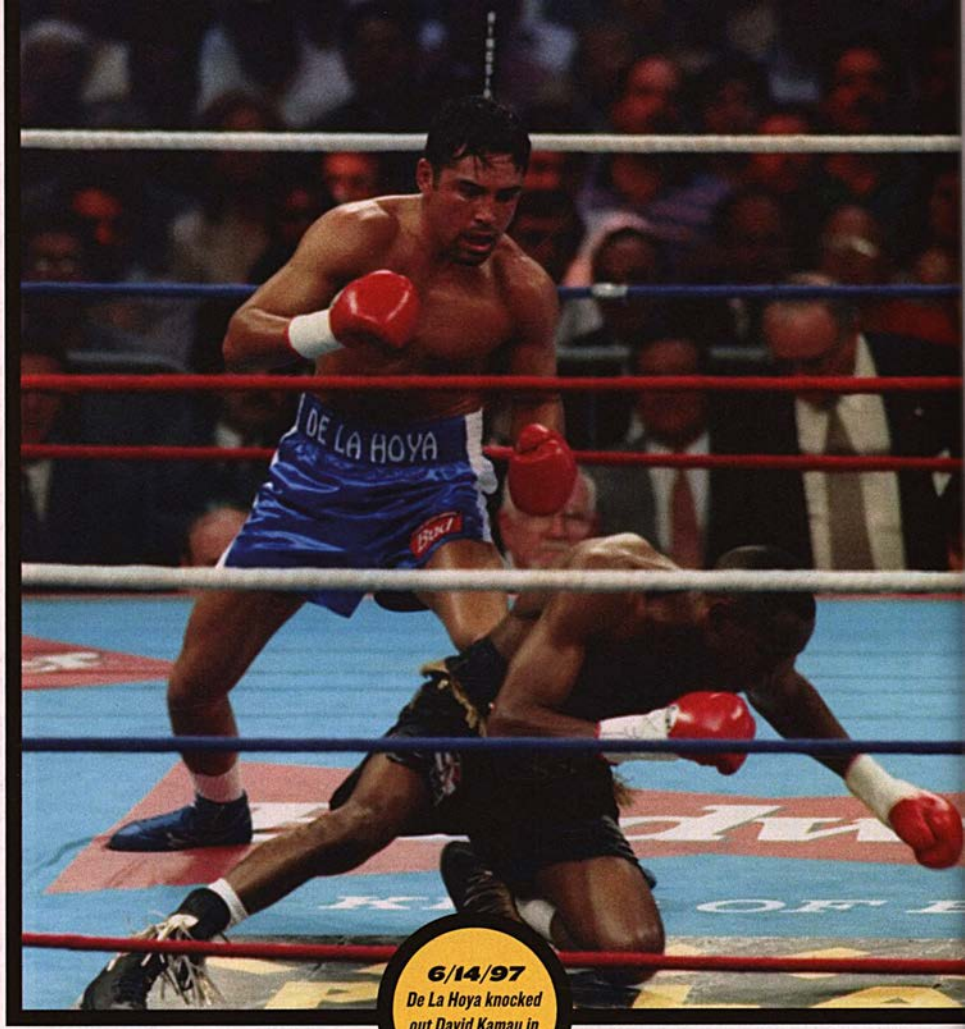
De La Hoya would also feature at No. 1 in the annual KO Magazine 100. The status report for De La Hoya read: "The Golden Boy has proved his class by fighting class. True, his decision victory over Pernell Whitaker didn't exactly remind anybody of Dempsey-Willard. But so what? 'Sweet Pea' makes everybody look bad. Miguel Angel Gonzalez was no joke either. By comparison, after 24 fights, Sugar Ray Leonard had yet to win his first world title. Oscar's already won three."

Left out of that analysis was that Leonard's first 24 fights came in just his first 2½ years as a professional, but such is the excitement stars can generate. Jones, widely viewed as the biggest talent of his generation after a win over James Toney in 1994, had come into criticism for his opposition following a disqualification loss to Montell Griffin, which created some justification to shake things up in mythical polls.

The Whitaker win still wasn't the sort of affair boxing fans were looking for from De La Hoya. For the first time, De La Hoya had gone the distance in consecutive fights.

As if to remind fight fans of the excitement he could offer, De La Hoya's next fight moved to HBO's regular programming. He changed trainers for the contest as well, aligning with offense-minded Kronk impresario Emanuel Steward. Challenger David Kamau had lost only once, lasting the distance with Chavez in 1995. On June 14, 1997, De La Hoya smoked Kamau in just two rounds, finishing the matter with his patented left hook.

Then it was back to pay-per-view and the big-name veterans pool. Hector "Macho" Camacho had been more sideshow than superstar for several years by then, but a knockout of a comebacking Ray Leonard earlier in the year opened the door for a viable pay-per-view showdown. Camacho was 63-3-1, 35 years old, and brought at least one element the fight could sell on. Despite vicious beatings in losses to Chavez and Felix



6/14/97
De La Hoya knocked out David Kamau in Round 2.

Trinidad, Camacho had never been stopped. Could De La Hoya be the first to pull it off?

Call your local cable provider to find out.

The answer was "no" in a fight where Camacho came to hear the final bell and little else. The September 13 contest was billed as "Opposites Attack." De La Hoya did almost all of the attacking, hurting Camacho early and leaving the veteran to clinch incessantly. Camacho was docked a point for the holding in the final round but made it all the way there. De La Hoya scored a knockdown in the ninth and won every round on two scorecards, but he couldn't put Camacho away.

No boxer ever did. It didn't matter. The fight did north of 550,000 buys on pay-per-view.

The marriage between Steward and De La Hoya seemed to be clicking after two fights. Previous trainer Jesus Rivero was more defensively focused. Steward saw a more dangerous man to mold. Bernard Fernandez recounted in KO following the Camacho fight that Steward said, "Look at his eyes. He's the most competitive fighter I've ever seen. He's not content just to win. He wants to be sensational. When he goes into the ring, he's in his glory. He loves the excitement of a big fight. Before the Kamau fight, I said, 'You really love this, don't you?' And he said, 'You'd better believe it.'"

Steward would be replaced before De La Hoya's 1997 finale by another veteran sage, Gil Clancy. Oscar's corner at least retained the consistency of trainer Robert Alcazar, who had been with De La Hoya since the amateurs. If the constant changes to the lead voice was affecting De La Hoya, there was little evidence against his next challenger, Wilfredo Rivera.

Rivera had scored four consecutive knockouts since his close losses to Whitaker. The Puerto Rican contender had never been stopped as a professional. That was about to change.

Covering the fight for the Los Angeles Times, Steve Springer recounted, "World Boxing Council welterweight champion Oscar De La Hoya made sure it never came down to the scorecards, made sure there was no repeat of a controversial loss by George Foreman last month in [New Jersey] by slashing open the eye of challenger Wilfredo Rivera in the second round of Saturday night's title fight at the Atlantic City Convention Hall. From then on it was not a matter of if, but when. Rivera, with blood streaming down the right side of his face for most of the remainder of the match, fought gamely, but ineffectively until ringside physician Howard Taylor finally stopped the fight at 2:48 of the eighth round before 11,271, improving De La Hoya's unbeaten mark to 27-0 with 22 knockouts."

De La Hoya scored a knockdown in the fourth and successfully defended his welterweight title for the third time. It was his least successful pay-per-view show of the year, bringing in less than 240,000 purchasing homes, but as part of an overall tally for the year it was hard to miss a bonanza. De La Hoya ended the year at 5-0, scored two knockouts, and tabbed just shy of 2 million PPV buys along with millions in gate revenue.

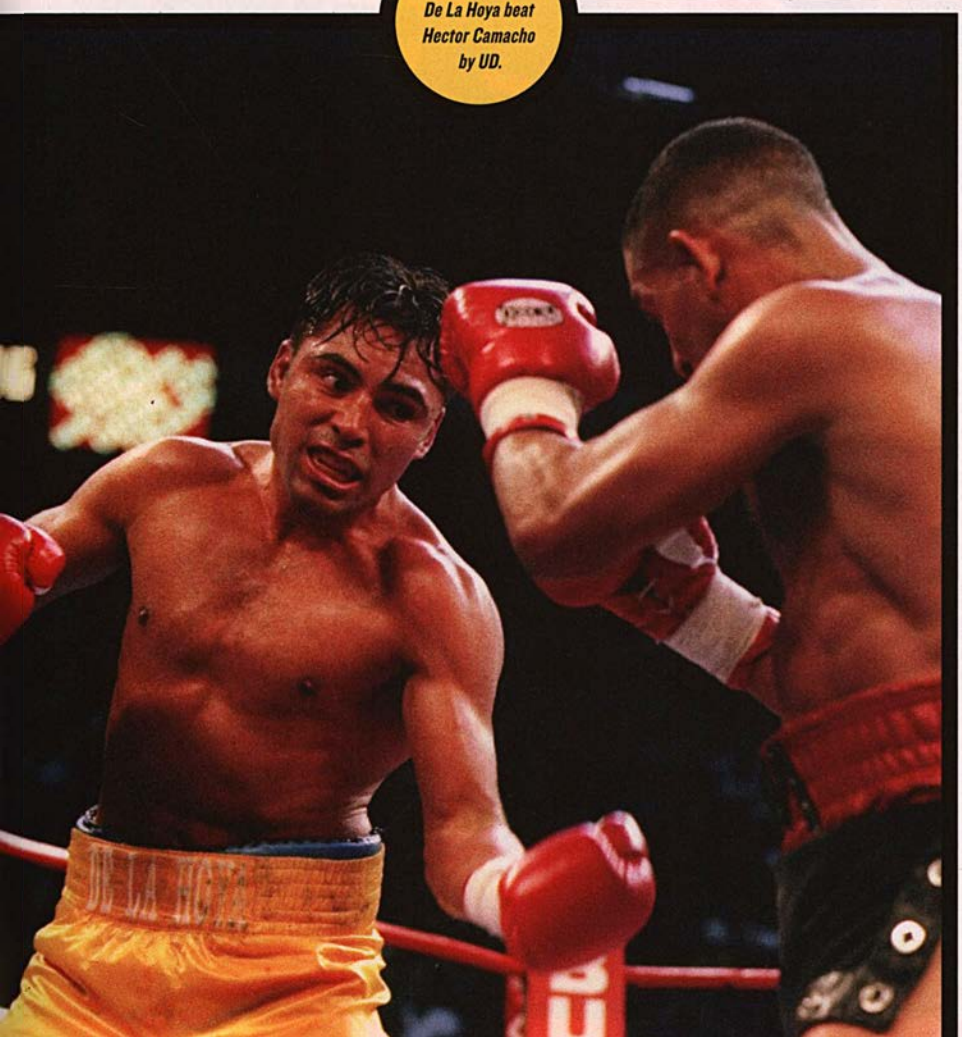
Boxing had the superstar it thought it might when The Golden Boy came home from the 1992 Olympics with gold. 1997 was the year that stamped it beyond doubt ... but hardcore boxing fans were starting to notice who wasn't on the other side of the ring.

Chavez in 1996, Whitaker and Camacho in 1997 ... they were already receding into boxing's past. At welterweight, fellow undefeated young titleholders Ike Quartey and Felix Trinidad loomed. They were the real tests, the threats to come, and the whispers were starting.

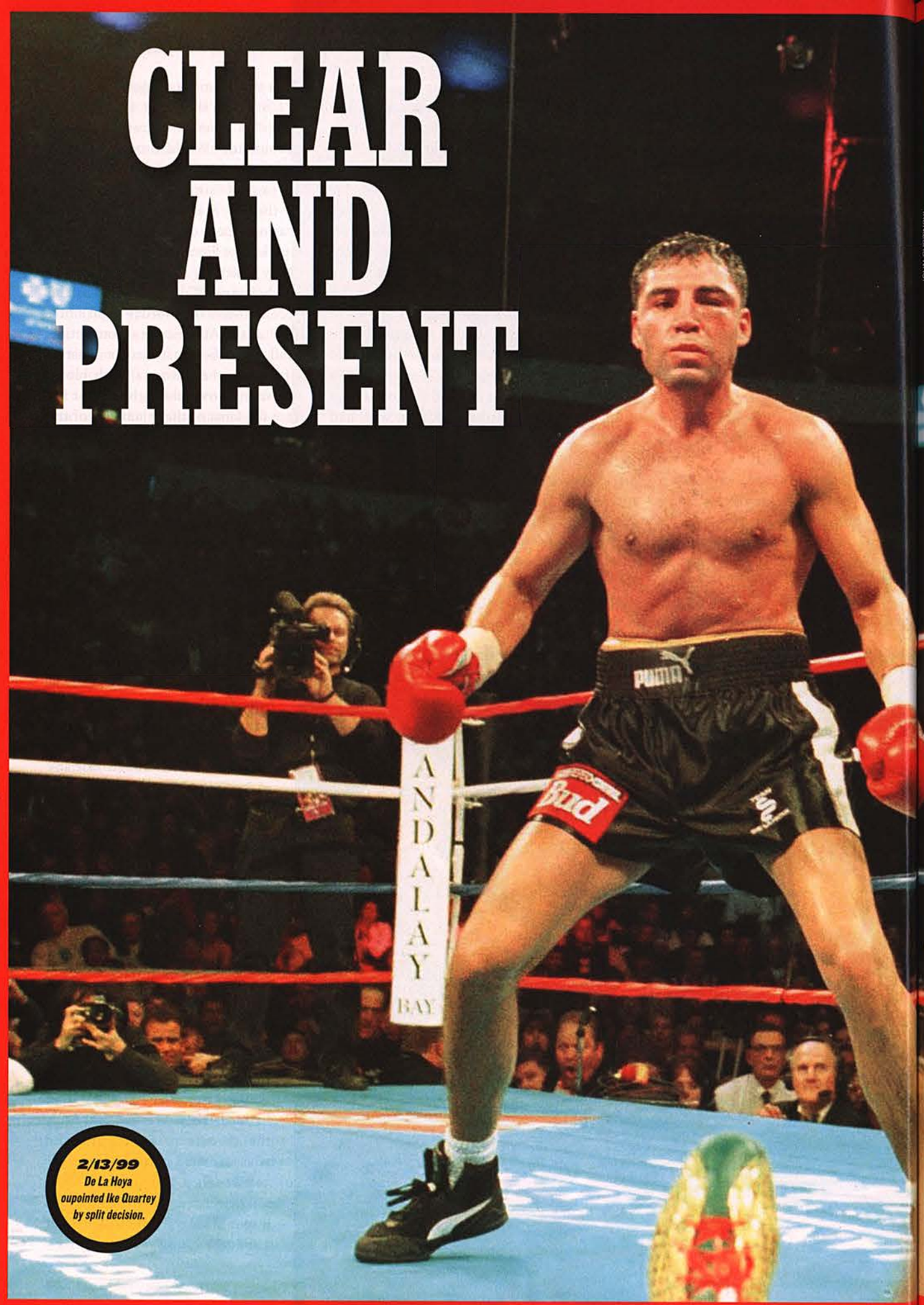
When?

The answer would come, but it would take a little longer than 1998.

9/13/97
De La Hoya beat Hector Camacho by UD.



CLEAR AND PRESENT

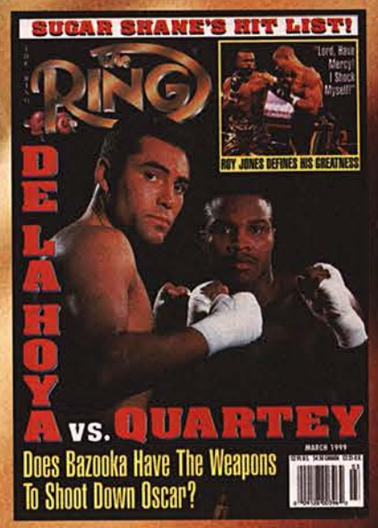


2/13/99
De La Hoya oupointed Ike Quartey by split decision.

IKE QUARTEY REPRESENTED THE FIRST REAL PHYSICAL THREAT TO **DE LA HOYA'S** WELTERWEIGHT TITLE REIGN, AND THE FORMIDABLE GHANAIAN LIVED UP TO IT IN ONE OF THE GOLDEN BOY'S HARDEST-FOUGHT VICTORIES

By **Ron Borges**

JOHN GURZINSKI



Oscar De La Hoya understood what the presence of Ike "Bazooka" Quartey across the ring from him meant. It meant, for perhaps the first time in his career, danger was lurking only the length of a long jab away. De La Hoya insisted before the first bell sounded on February 13, 1999, at the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas that he welcomed its arrival.

In a gambler's town where most visitors come away losers, the undefeated Golden Boy of boxing was pushing all his chips into the center of that ring. Golden or tarnished? That was the risk Quartey posed that night.

At the time, the 26-year-old De La Hoya was 29-0 with 24 knockouts, but more importantly he was an Olympic gold medalist, a winner of five world titles in four weight classes and 17 straight title fights and the biggest non-heavyweight drawing card in the sport. He had already taken belts from the likes of Genaro Hernandez, Julio Cesar Chavez, Pernell Whitaker and Miguel Angel Gonzalez, all formidable champions although considered flawed in one way or another, either by a lack of size or the ravages of age. Quartey, the undefeated former WBA welterweight titleholder, had none of those issues dogging him.

Nine months shy of 30, Quartey was a fighter with a piston-like jab, concussion-producing power, a 34-0-1 record that included 29 knockouts and a healthy disrespect for golden boys like De La Hoya. There was only one word to describe what he was at that moment.

"If you can see danger in front of you and feel this guy can beat you, you do everything it takes to win," De La Hoya said before the fight. "This is a dangerous fight, but I wanted it. I needed this. I was losing my focus. I need dangerous fights now to stay motivated. Sometimes getting ready for [these types of fighters]

is easier than getting ready for Joe Schmoe."

Perhaps so, but the problem with "those types of" fighters is they don't fight like Joe Schmoe. They come to the arena with supreme confidence and bad intentions, and no one felt the latter more than Isufu "Ike" Quartey, a native of Ghana who had learned to fight in the accepted way. He fought to keep what little he had.

That was long before he wore $250 sunglasses, as he did during fight week. It was when he was a street kid from Bukom, a tough neighborhood in the bowels of Accra, Ghana's capital city. It was there that Ike Quartey first learned the value of being dangerous.

The youngest of the 27 children of Robert Quartey, a court bailiff with five wives and a hard-earned reputation as a street fighter, Ike grew up hungry, literally and figuratively. As a kid, he once fought savagely to retain ownership of a scuffed soccer ball, one of his few possessions. The kid who tried to take it from him was Alfred Kotey, himself a future world champion whom Quartey would follow into a steamy boxing gym to begin walking their dual roads to fame and fortune. But long before he got to his $3 million moment with De La Hoya, there was the matter of ownership of that scuffed ball to settle.

"You have something someone wants, they take it," Quartey once said of his boyhood while sitting in a Las Vegas coffee shop. "Back there, you fight in the streets every day. You fight for everything. That is life there."

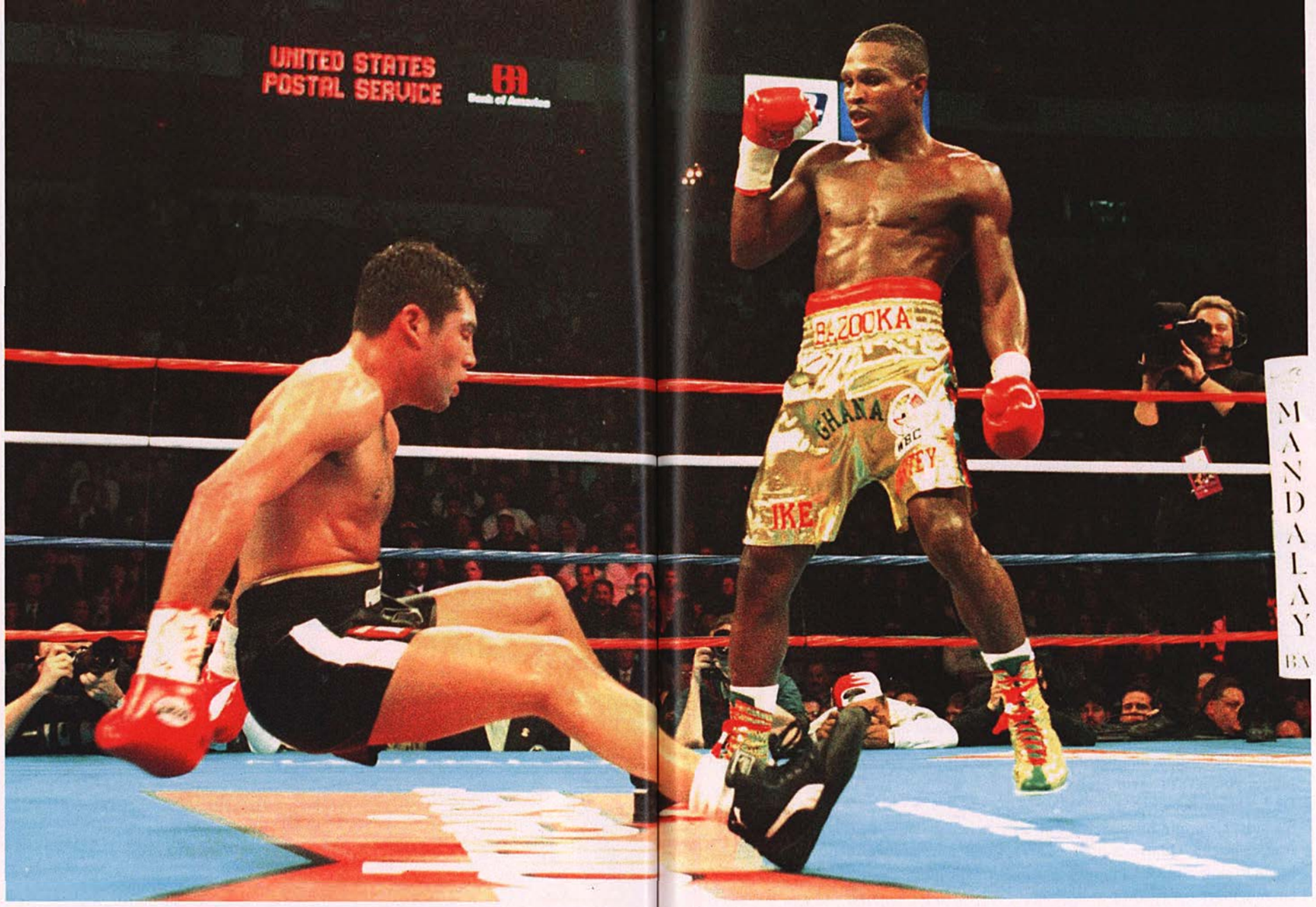
Quartey's fighting life in the ring began when he left his father's crowded home in Bukom as a young boy to move in with a boxing trainer. If one Googles the word "Bukom," the second thing that comes up is "Bukom is known for its output of successful boxers to America." Like Kotey and boxing idol Azumah Nelson, Quartey would become another fighting export of Bukom.

"I left my house at 7 or 8," Quartey claimed. "My mother did not want me to be a boxer, so I went to live with my trainer."

Verifying such details of the life of a boy from Ghana is difficult, but one thing was clear by the evening of February 13, 1999: Quartey had learned to fight somewhere. And by the time he faced De La Hoya, he had more than lived up to the reputation of a brother he never knew.

The original Ike Quartey won a silver medal as a light welterweight at the 1960 Olympics in Rome when he was 26, nearly nine years before the younger Ike was born. While Isufu was fighting over a soccer ball, his big brother was off making a living in Mexico. The younger Ike had no recollection of him, but he knew what he had accomplished and so took his name and followed his road through pain to fame, a road that now had led him to face the American Golden Boy whom he'd grown to hate.

There were many boxers who resented the fame and fortune young De La Hoya had amassed since turning pro only six years earlier, but Quartey had another reason for his feelings. He believed the postponement of their original fight date three months earlier had been a ploy by De La Hoya to avoid the fate that now awaited him. De La Hoya withdrew from the original fight date after suffering a cut eyelid in sparring, but the rumor was that he was not in tip-top shape and needed extra time to get ready for the legitimate threat that Quartey presented.



HECTOR MATA

De La Hoya floored Quartey in the sixth, but the dangerous Ghanaian quickly returned the favor.

Quartey's enmity was exacerbated by what had become a 14-month layoff since fighting to a disappointing draw against Jose Luis Lopez, who had dropped him twice. Quartey's trainer claimed Quartey had refused to postpone that fight despite suffering with a virus some later claimed was a case of malaria, and he'd later been stripped of his WBA title for choosing to fight De La Hoya for the biggest payday of his career rather than a lesser WBA-sanctioned challenger.

Quartey came to believe that not only had the decision to fight De La Hoya cost him his title, but also that De La Hoya, who now held the WBC welterweight belt, had only agreed to face him after seeing he'd struggled against Lopez. For this, Quartey said, De La Hoya must pay a steep price.

"I want to hurt him because he made me mad," Quartey said before the fight. "I am going to beat him like he was my son."

De La Hoya, on the other hand, understood fully what Quartey meant and soon would learn how right he was when Quartey's stinging jab began to cause his left cheek to swell and his nose to leak plasma barely two rounds into the fight. De La Hoya assumed he'd countered that early offensive when, 10 seconds into Round 6, he landed a perfectly timed left hook that sent Quartey flying backward and down on the seat of his gold satin pants. He skittered along the canvas like seed scattered by a farmer but quickly scrambled up, and within seconds he sent an onrushing De La Hoya to the floor with his own hard left. Shots fired!

De La Hoya had rushed in recklessly, looking to finish Quartey, and missed a wild left uppercut. Quartey countered with a thudding left hook that clearly hurt De La Hoya far more than Quartey had been hurt when he went down.

Following the lessons he'd learned in the streets of Bukom, Quartey attacked wildly as De La Hoya held on, now clearly aware that his concerns about Quartey's power had been justified. At one point, referee Mitch Halpern briefly called time to warn Quartey for hitting out of a clinch. That seemed to momentarily ease the damage De La Hoya was sustaining, but Quartey came back in Round 7 and resumed pushing his jab into De La Hoya's face as if he were driving nails into a 2x4.

When De La Hoya returned to his corner after that round, the left side of his face was swelling noticeably and trainer Gil Clancy implored him to change his tactics.

"You have better legs than the other guy!" Clancy hollered. "Use 'em!"

At this juncture, De La Hoya realized what he had said before the fight was true. This was indeed a dangerous man in front of him, one who required clear thinking as well as hard punching to overcome.

"I can just go in and brawl, but is that the smart thing to do?" De La Hoya had asked before the fight. "I got to figure something out, because if he connects, he can knock me out; and if I connect, I can knock him out. I know what kind of opposition I'm facing this time. This is the first true

Both fighters celebrated when the battle was finally over ...

test of my career. The six years I've been in professional boxing were all preparation for this fight. I know the danger. Now we see what happens."

To that point, what was happening was Quartey controlling the pace of the fight with his jab while taking minimal chances. Something had to be done to break that pattern, and slowly but surely De La Hoya did it with the use of his legs and an ever-increasing punch production.

While De La Hoya had entered the fight with a healthy respect for Quartey, he was firmly convinced the Ghanaian had two significant defects. First, Quartey did well against fighters who stood in front of him but struggled against those who moved laterally quickly. As for the second flaw:

"He doesn't have the best head movement," De La Hoya opined. "He's kind of a straight-up, stand-up fighter whose defense isn't great. And he tends to fade late. I need to capitalize on that."

In boxing today, the championship rounds are rounds 11 and 12, the additional rounds where champions are made. So it was on this night. With Clancy urging him to "show the judges you want to win the round," De La Hoya began to increase both his movement and his punch output. And as he did, Quartey's production began to slow and De La Hoya started landing more consistent power shots. Gradually, he also began to seize control of the exchanges.

Quartey nailed De La Hoya with a crushing right hand midway through Round 9, but the champion shook it off and landed a hard combination in response that seemed to bring Quartey's offense to a standstill. Quartey's once-thudding jab was now arriving less frequently and in single-file fashion while De La Hoya began to attack his body and head with growing ferocity. The tide was turning, rolling in for De La Hoya and running out for Quartey.

De La Hoya snapped Quartey's head back in the 10th with a hard left and continued to carry the fight to his challenger in Round 11, yet the fight's outcome still seemed to be hanging from a razor's edge when the bell sounded to open the 12th and final round.

Perhaps sensing he was on the brink of losing his WBC welterweight title, De La Hoya savagely attacked. Twice he strafed Quartey with sizzling left hooks in the round's opening seconds and when Quartey launched a right hook in response, De La Hoya avoided it and nailed him with a counter left that sent Quartey sprawling to the floor for a second time.

The smirk Quartey had worn for most of the fight was now gone as De La Hoya swarmed him like a family of angry wasps, raining in blow after blow as Quartey stood pinned against the ropes. As Halpern closed in with concern on his face, Quartey returned fire just often enough to convince him not to stop the fight, though he would have been justified in doing so.

After a minute-long attack, De La Hoya was spent but had made his point. In the most critical moment, he had shown who he was. He was not only The Golden Boy but a "hombre malo." A baadd man!

Ike Quartey had fought a controlled fight in which he took few chances and paid for it, winning the early rounds with his jab but then frittering away his lead by being outworked and outlanded by De La Hoya. According to CompuBox stats, Quartey threw only 41 punches in Round 10 and 43 in Round 11 before being overwhelmed in the final round, when De La Hoya threw 69 punches and landed an astonishing 41 to Quartey's 18.

"I thought Oscar was going to kill him," Clancy said later. "He hit Ike with left hooks I don't think anybody I know could take."

In the end, judge Ken Morita of Japan scored the fight 116-112 for De La Hoya and England's John Keane had it 116-113, a spread shared by most at ringside. Somehow, English judge Larry O'Connell gave the edge to Quartey, 115-114, a score most ringside observers found curious and difficult to defend. Quartey was not among his critics, however.

"[De La Hoya] did nothing," Quartey said despite the fact he spit those words out through a badly swollen right cheek. "I did everything. All he did was come to survive and that is what he did. You saw the fight. You know I won the fight. You know I couldn't win a decision in Las Vegas."

Certainly he couldn't after being knocked down twice and outworked in the fight's final three rounds. De La Hoya's team had analyzed Quartey's punch data and found he threw considerably less often in the late rounds, a fact they would exploit when this again proved to be the case.

Curiously, De La Hoya continuously ignored his fight plan, however, even after Clancy's pleas to use his superior speed and movement to keep the more mechanical and methodical Quartey at bay. Instead, he often stood in front of his challenger, looking to trade punches as if to prove a point. In the end, that approach worked but not without a price.

... but the bruised De La Hoya would emerge as the clear winner.

It was over an hour after the fight before De La Hoya arrived at the post-fight press conference. As he spoke, he rubbed a Dixie cup filled with ice against his left cheek and peered through a half-closed left eye as if peeking through venetian blinds.

"I thought I was in total control, but I wanted to go out with a bang," De La Hoya explained. "I wanted to prove I can fight. I wanted to do everything possible to get a devastating win."

Clancy conceded De La Hoya "got caught up in it, and showed he has the ability to fight as well as box. He showed a lot of heart, which is what got him through, but he spent the entire fight fighting Quartey's fight. If he used his legs, it would have been a lot easier for Oscar, but it was one of those nights he wanted to fight more than he wanted to box."

Three months later, De La Hoya would face Oba Carr, who had given Quartey fits three years earlier, and would knock the Kronk disciple down in the opening round before stopping him in Round 11.

Quartey did not fight for 14 months. When he did, he lost and never again seemed to represent the danger Oscar De La Hoya faced down in what many believe was his greatest fight.

SUGAR AND GOLD

THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SHOWDOWN BETWEEN **DE LA HOYA** AND BOYHOOD RIVAL **SHANE MOSLEY** WAS A SUPERFIGHT OF CONVENIENCE THAT EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS

By Steve Kim

In the immediate aftermath of Oscar De La Hoya's controversial loss to Felix Trinidad in their September 1999 welterweight title unification showdown, there was talk of a rematch between the two stars. However, the animosity between the two camps quickly made that a non-starter.

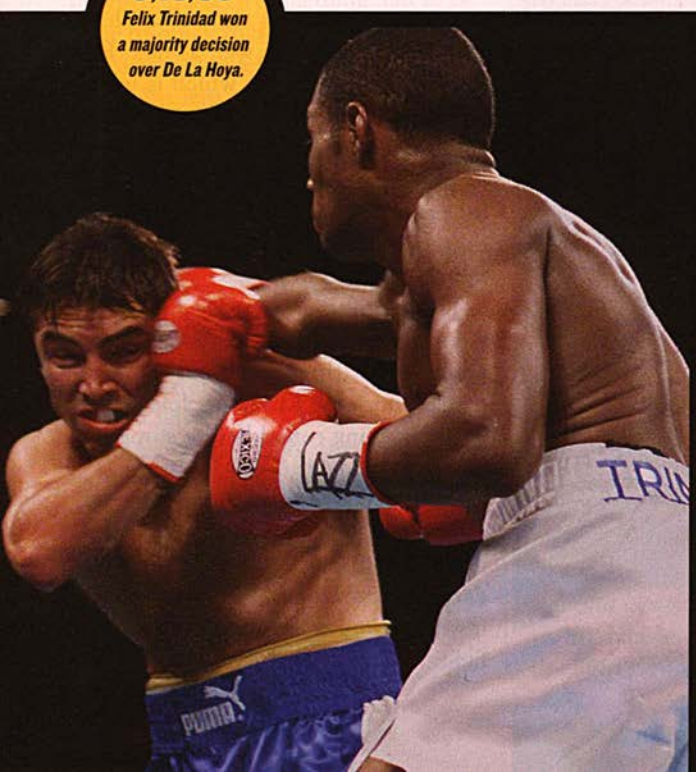
Trinidad and Don King made the decision to move up to junior middleweight and face WBA titleholder David Reid in March of the following year.

That left "The Golden Boy" and Bob Arum with a decision: If they were to stay at welterweight, just what was the big money fight out there for De La Hoya, who at the time was the game's biggest pay-per-view attraction?

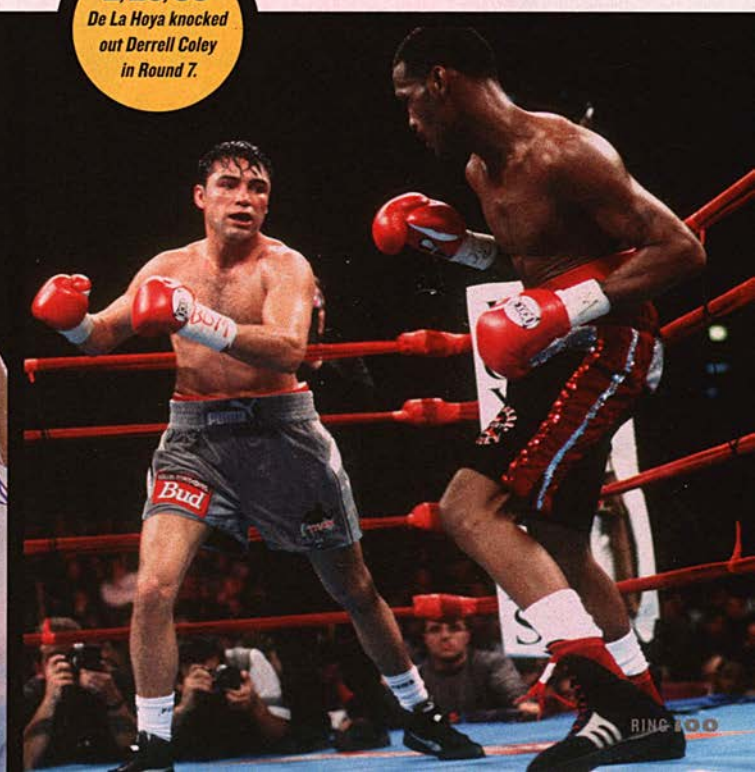
De La Hoya bounced back after the disappointing loss to Trinidad by scoring a seventh-round knockout of Derrell Coley at Madison Square Garden in February 2000. And as they looked ahead, Top Rank CEO Bob Arum took a cue from, of all people, Larry Merchant of HBO Sports.

Merchant's suggestion was an all-Southern California clash between De La Hoya and Shane Mosley, who had been the long-reigning IBF lightweight champion.

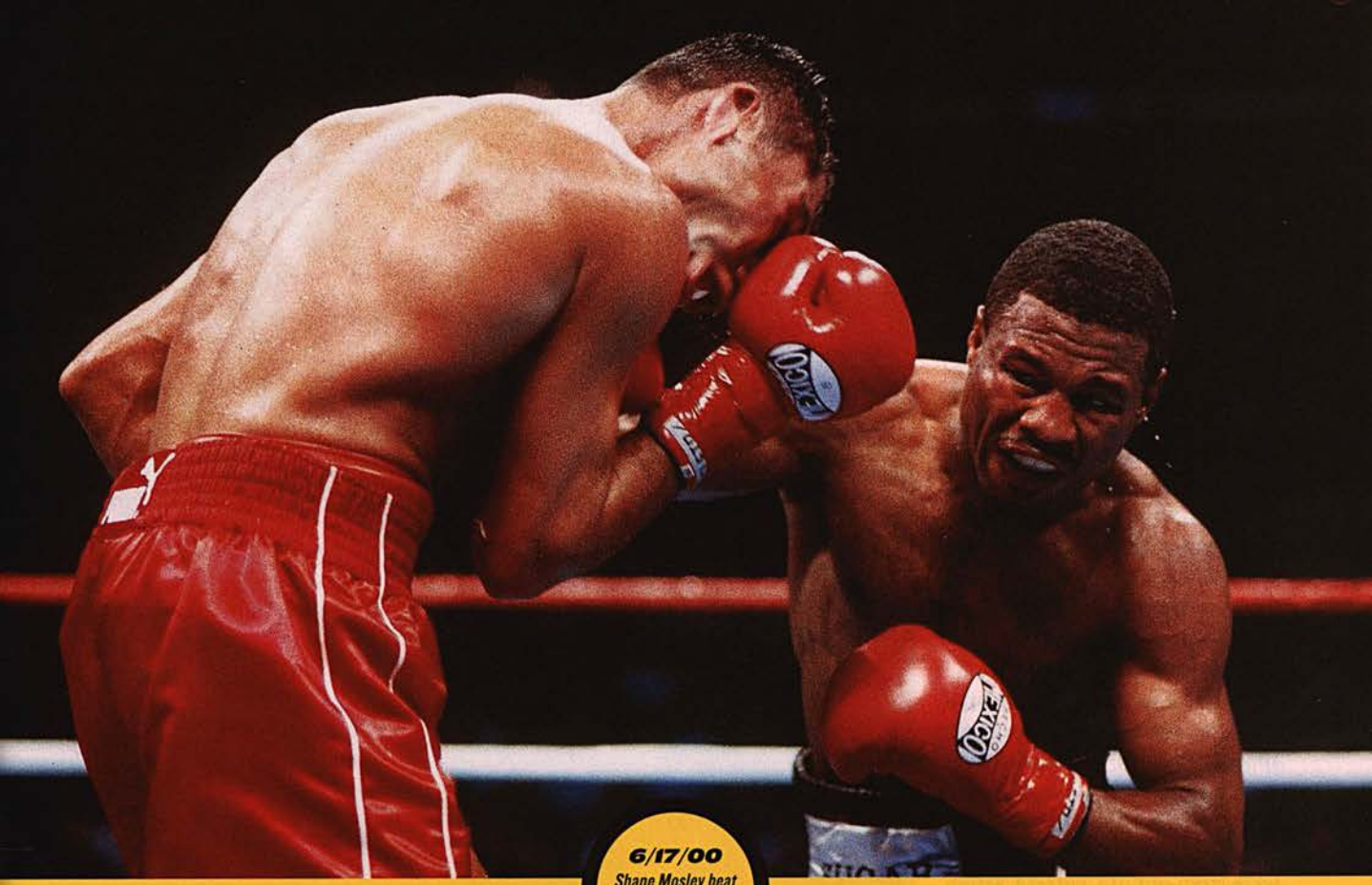
"Arum had a little dinner and he said, 'Who should Oscar fight next?'" recalled Merchant. "Because of the weight difference at the time, it hadn't come up. But I thought it should be next, and that would be a big event, a good matchup."



9/18/99
Felix Trinidad won a majority decision over De La Hoya.



2/26/00
De La Hoya knocked out Derrell Coley in Round 7.



6/17/00
Shane Mosley beat De La Hoya by split decision.

SUGAR AND GOLD

The longtime promoter confirms that it was Merchant's idea but doesn't recall exactly when he made his proposal. But Merchant says Arum "loved the idea."

With Trinidad having moved up in weight, there was no other marquee name in the division left.

Merchant explained why he was so intrigued by this match-up: "They were two outstanding fighters still in their primes. They had a background, having sparred when they were younger. They were two local kids who had achieved international recognition."

De La Hoya, the 1992 Olympic gold medalist, came into the sport with an abundance of hype surrounding him. With his skills, matinee idol looks and being Mexican-American, it was as if he were fresh out of Central Casting. After making his pro debut at the Great Western Forum in November 1992, stopping Lamar Williams in one round, he inked a deal with Top Rank. That meant highly respected matchmaker Bruce Trampler would be tasked with nurturing the young prodigy.

His instructions from Arum were simple: "This kid is special – don't screw it up."

"The way we usually do it, we just evaluate fight-by-fight. And you hate to use cliches, but you take it one fight at a time," explained Trampler. "There was an actual game plan. You feel your way along and you try and project where you can be a year or two from now, and then you look at opponents that match up well with him and what would be a big fight."

There were some hiccups along the way, as a weight-drained De La Hoya (who was then competing as a junior lightweight) was sent down by the likes of Narciso Valenzuela and Giorgio Campanella in fights where he quickly dusted himself off and

CHRISTOPHER POLK

De La Hoya fought a very smart fight in the Mosley rematch but fell short on points.

scored knockouts. But Trampler admits, "Arum and I had a few talks – I was concerned about his chin."

It turns out De La Hoya had solid whiskers, and he eventually won titles at junior lightweight, lightweight, junior welterweight and welterweight by his mid-20s. De La Hoya has lauded Trampler for the role he played in his development as a prizefighter. He told the Los Angeles Times in 2008, "He knew when to throw me in with the dogs and when to throw me in with the cats."

As De La Hoya achieved stardom, the decision on who he faced had as much to do about business as it did boxing.

Trampler explained, "Todd [duBoef, a Top Rank executive], Bob and I would go down to Los Angeles to meet Oscar. It would be the father, it would be Oscar, the trainer at the moment, at other times Mike Hernandez [then Oscar's adviser] would be there, and we'd go over opponents.

"It would be a roundtable. Todd would give his opinion, Arum would give his, and I would give mine," Trampler continued. "All through it, Oscar would feign boredom. He'd be playing with a pencil, rolling his eyes. And at the end of every session, inevitably he'd say, 'OK, which one pays the most?'"

But according to Arum, "There were variables. Money I'd say was the most important thing. But it was never, 'Well, we're going to face this guy because it's $100,000 or $500,000 more.' No, that's not how it worked."

The ingredients for a De La Hoya-Mosley fight seemed to fit perfectly for everyone involved.

SUGAR AND GOLD

Oscar was still the game's biggest star. Mosley was one of the sport's best performers with a fan-friendly style, and he'd had plenty of exposure on HBO the past few years. This fight would be a proper way for the brand new Staples Center to showcase its first big fight card.

There was also this factor: De La Hoya's side liked the physical matchup.

"I thought Oscar was too big for him," admitted Arum.

While "Sugar" Shane was a formidable lightweight, having made eight successful defenses of the IBF belt that he captured against Phillip Holiday in the summer of 1997, there are weight classes for a reason. Mosley made the decision to bypass the 140-pound weight class altogether and go right up to welterweight. His debut in September 1999 was a 10-round struggle versus the seasoned Wilfredo Rivera, who gave him all he could handle before Rivera was halted in the last round. Mosley then had a much easier time with veteran Willy Wise, stopping him in three.

But still, the perception was that Mosley was too small.

Yet, he pointed out to Ring Magazine years later, "If you look back, Oscar was fighting at 132 in the Olympics and I was 139. I was actually a bigger fighter."

This particular fight was one that Shane and his father/trainer, Jack Mosley, had been yearning for. While they were respected within boxing circles, this was a fight that would catapult them into stardom – and a different tax bracket.

"Everyone in California knew that we were the two top guys, and they wanted to see us fight. It was just the world didn't know how good a fighter I was. They knew I was a great fighter, but they didn't know how good I was after moving from lightweight to welter," recalled Mosley, who was recently inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

So the stage was set on the night of June 17, 2000. It was a fight billed as "Destiny" and a sell-out crowd of just over 20,000 packed the Staples Center, which was in the midst of hosting the NBA Finals between the Los Angeles Lakers and Indiana Pacers.

After a brisk opening round that saw Mosley come out of the gate quickly with hard right hands, the next few rounds were controlled by the length and reach of De La Hoya. While Mosley had the advantage in hand speed, the harder punches in the opening half of the fight were landed by De La Hoya, who built a lead on the scorecards.

At this point, it looked like size would indeed matter. A good big man beating a good small man.

"He was beating the hell out of Mosley in the first half of the fight, to a point where I felt sorry for Mosley," said Trampler. "And then Jack Mosley made some adjustments with Shane and Oscar didn't adjust with him."

It was in the late rounds that Mosley became more energetic and emboldened as he repeatedly beat Oscar to the punch in exchanges and would go southpaw periodically to give a different look. The action was fierce and competitive, but in the championship rounds it was the native of Pomona who was just a shade quicker off the trigger and a tad more accurate in his salvos.

The 12th round was a memorable one, with both men letting their hands go liberally. They both sensed that the fight hung in the balance. De La Hoya valiantly tried his best to fight off the hard-charging Mosley, who kept coming with a barrage of right hands over the top. While both men landed their share of punches, it was Mosley who landed the telling blows in this memorable stanza.

In the final seconds, the crowd rose in appreciation of what they had been witnessing. As the bell sounded to end the contest, De La Hoya and Mosley tapped gloves and embraced in a show of mutual respect.

"The way they went at each other, the way they finished the fight, in the grand scheme of things neither one lost because of how good the fight was," said Merchant, who was ringside for HBO calling that pay-per-view event.

But it was Mosley who was awarded a split decision, as judges Lou Filippo (116-112) and Pat Russell (115-113) overruled the card of Marty Sammon, who scored the fight 115-113 for De La Hoya.

"To his credit, Mosley turned it around and that was Oscar's first real loss," said Trampler. Their second encounter in 2003 was a solid fight but didn't come close to matching the dramatic nature of their first go-round. The rematch also went the 12-round distance, with Mosley winning a disputed unanimous decision at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

The initial encounter with Mosley would end up being De La Hoya's last bout as a full-fledged Top Rank fighter, as he eventually broke out on his own and began his own promotional company. Regardless, Arum has no harsh feelings toward his former client after all these years.

He described it as "hugely net positive, hugely." Arum pointed out, "The relationship ended up splintering, and you see that it came together after that for a number of fights. My relationship with Oscar as a person is really good." RING

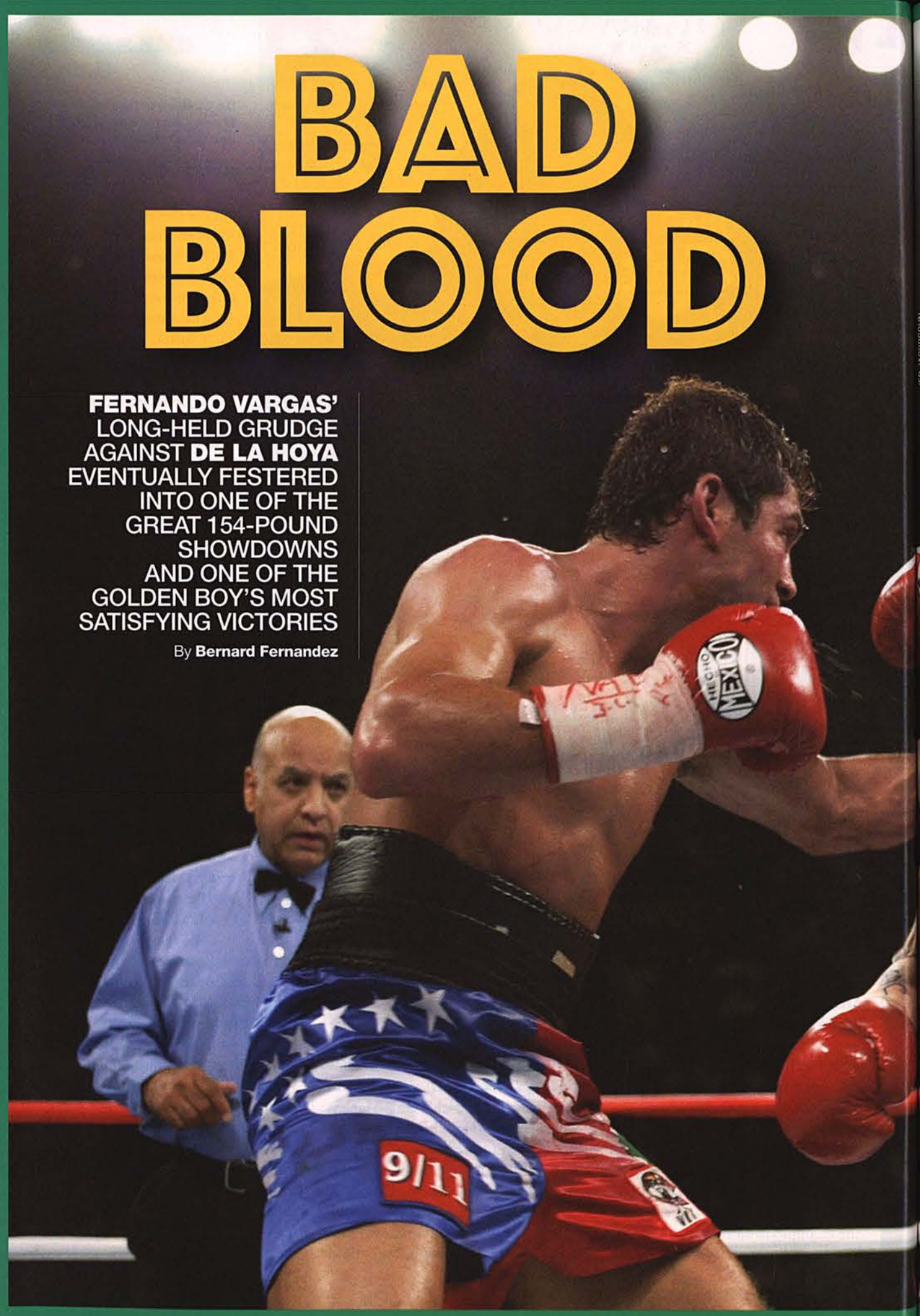
De La Hoya alongside Mosley, Sugar Ray Leonard and Shane Mosley Jr.

MARK DAVIS

BAD BLOOD

FERNANDO VARGAS' LONG-HELD GRUDGE AGAINST **DE LA HOYA** EVENTUALLY FESTERED INTO ONE OF THE GREAT 154-POUND SHOWDOWNS AND ONE OF THE GOLDEN BOY'S MOST SATISFYING VICTORIES

By **Bernard Fernandez**



JED JACOBSOHN

Nine years is a long time to hold a grudge. But the ill will that festered between Oscar De La Hoya and "Ferocious" Fernando Vargas – mostly, but not entirely, on Vargas' side of the equation – began nearly a decade before they squared off in a junior middleweight title unification showdown on September 14, 2002, at Las Vegas' Mandalay Bay, a matchup that was appropriately dubbed "Bad Blood," given the increasingly hostile war of words that preceded the first punch thrown in the ring.

Color commentator Larry Merchant set the stage for viewers of the HBO pay-per-view telecast by reciting some of the back-and-forth taunts flung by the two proud Mexican-American fighters, and they were as legitimate as it ever gets in boxing, not part of a contrived and orchestrated feud to help hype an event that needed no such chicanery.

"I've got to decide whether this is a fight or a grand opera," Merchant said between rattling off some of the derogatory remarks that called to mind the verbal antagonism that for so long marked the relationship, or non-relationship, of legendary archrivals Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. "For years, these two fighters have been behaving like tenors barking at each other across a stage. 'You're a phony!' 'You're a thug!' 'I'd die to win!' 'I'll retire if I lose!' 'I'll swallow the worm with my tequila!' 'I have more hot chilies in my blood!' 'I hate you!'"

Nor was any hint of even a tenuous peace accord reached when De La Hoya annexed Vargas' WBA 154-pound title and the vacant Ring championship to go along with the WBC belt he already possessed, adding an exclamation point to a bout he was leading on two of the three official scorecards by registering an 11th-round stoppage. Determining that a bleeding Vargas, who had been dropped and hurt by an Oscar left hook, was too impaired to continue, referee Joe Cortez stepped in and waved things off after an elapsed time of 1 minute, 48 seconds.

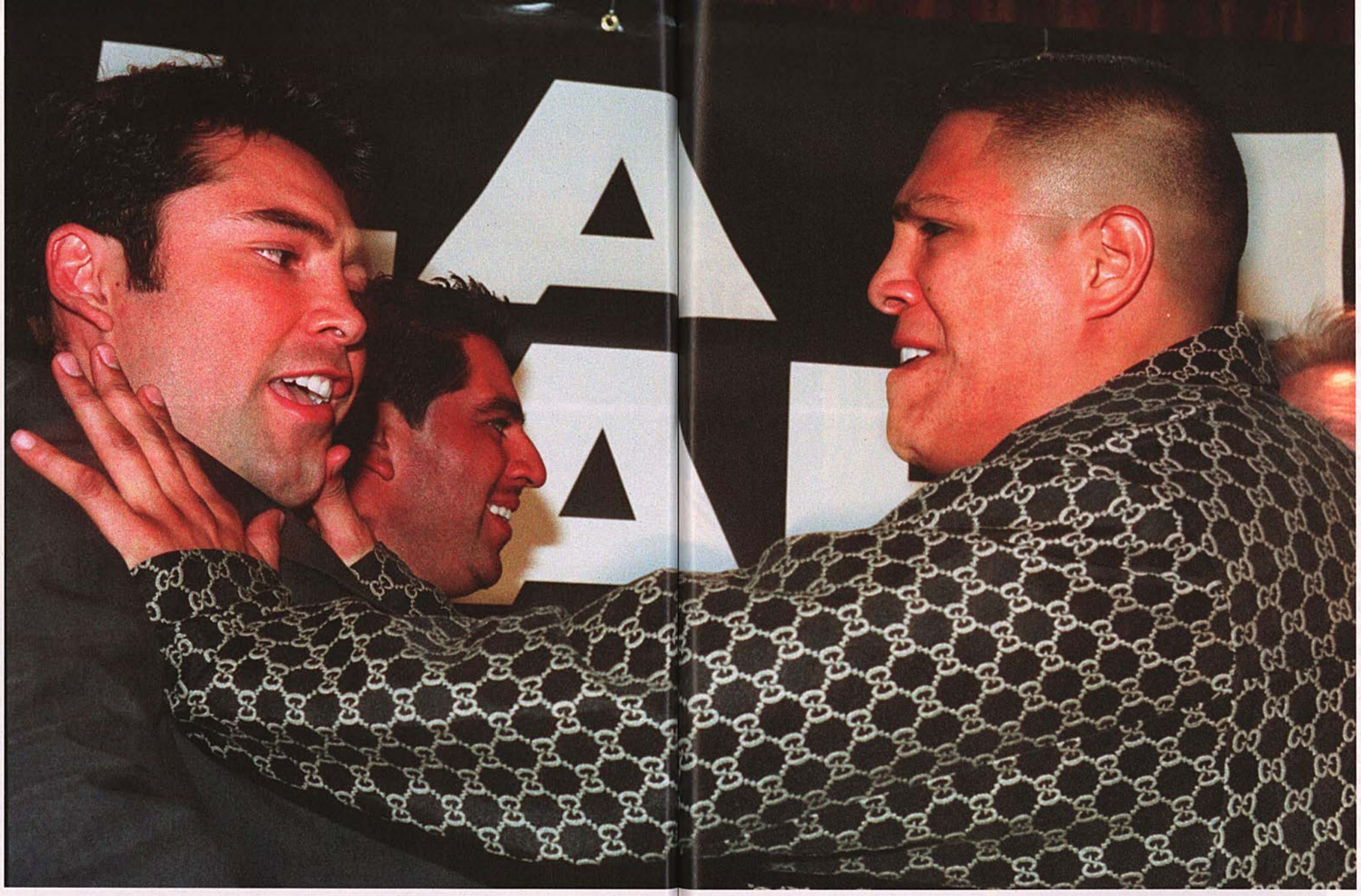
The then-24-year-old Vargas, whose record dipped to 22-2 with 20 KOs, did not stick around to offer his post-fight thoughts to Merchant, although for this story he did insist, two decades later and contrary to the official scorecards that had De La Hoya up by margins of 96-94 (as tallied by judges Paul Smith and Doug Tucker), that the truest ament of what had transpired to that point was the card of the third judge, Patricia Morse Jarman, who had the Oxnard, California, resident ahead by 97-94.

"I thought I was winning the fight 'til I got caught," Vargas, now 44, said. "I was winning the fight on our scorecards. I was kicking ass. But the first time I got hurt, the fight was stopped.

"But my hat's off to Oscar. He's the best fighter that I ever faced. I've fought a lot of world champions in my career, a lot of Hall of Famers, but Oscar is the best – intelligent, boxing ability, good chin, offense, defense."

Such conciliatory words about a once-despised foe would not seem to be in keeping with Vargas' younger version of himself. That firebrand, now decidedly more

9/14/02 *De La Hoya stopped Fernando Vargas in the 11th round.*



The violence started before De La Hoya and Vargas even entered the ring.

mellow, admitted he fought with "a lot of rage, a lot of anger," primarily directed at the now-deceased biological father who wasn't there for him during his formative years. In his only defeat before snagging the dream shot against De La Hoya, Vargas was floored five times en route to a 12th-round TKO to Felix Trinidad. Before that epic fight, Vargas boasted that he had so roughed up nine sparring partners that they decided to pack up their gear and go home rather than to continue serving as human heavy bags.

"I'm not here to go soft on anybody," the unapologetically violent Vargas said as that camp wound down. "I'm in the business of hurtin' people, and business is good."

The hoped-for opponent upon whom he most wanted to inflict pain was De La Hoya, America's "Golden Boy" Olympic champion of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. For a time, Oscar was the hero and role model of the younger fighter, who would himself become a member of the U.S. boxing team at the 1996 Atlanta Games. But then an incident allegedly occurred in 1993, when the two fighters were training separately at altitude in Big Bear Lake, California, and Vargas, still an amateur, had eagerly consented to serve as a De La Hoya sparring partner. As Vargas recalls it, he slipped and fell into a snowbank during a run on an unfamiliar trail, coming up with a face full of snow and mud. Just then, Oscar ran by and laughed at Fernando's unsightly predicament.

"People had been saying I would be the next Oscar De La Hoya," Vargas said for this story. "But after that, I was, like, 'Fuck no, I'm the first Fernando Vargas.' That's how it began."

De La Hoya, now 49, says he has no such recollection of what Vargas described, but it was perhaps inevitable that the two Olympians would someday square off as pros, although Oscar for an extended period held firm to his stated belief that he would never grant the chirpy kid a career-high payday as a penalty for the barrage of sneers and put-downs. As part of his campaign to entice, or maybe goad, De La Hoya into taking him on inside the ropes, Vargas depicted himself as being "more Mexican" than Oscar, who hardly had grown up in the lap of luxury in East Los Angeles. The way Vargas told it, The Golden Boy had somehow turned his back on his ethnic roots by – gasp! – taking up the rich white guys' sport of golf.

It was a curious attack tactic, given that one of the most popular Mexican-American athletes ever is Texas-born golf legend Lee Trevino, affectionately known as "Merry Mex" and "Supermex," a Marine who learned the game as a caddie on public courses and is one of only four golfers to win the U.S. Open, the British Open and the PGA Championship at least twice.

Interestingly, Vargas now says that the golf thing was the one part of his sniping that was done mostly for the effect of infuriating De La Hoya, not because of any genuine dislike of the sport.

CHRIS FARINA/CORBIS

"I just wanted to have something to talk shit about," he says now. "I gotta be honest, I've played some golf. I don't see nothin' wrong with that. But at that time it was just something to get him aggravated so he would fight me."

De La Hoya readily admits that he did get aggravated, and increasingly so. "Everyone wants to fight me, and everyone wants to beat me," he said after the once-canceled, once-postponed fight (by four months because of an injury to De La Hoya's left hand that was slow to heal) finally neared, for which Oscar was to receive $14 million and Vargas $6 million. "I think it is strange he is so obsessed with me.

"What is being Mexican? Because I don't talk like him or dress like him, I'm not Mexican? I grew up on the same hard streets. But the fact is, I wanted to do something better in life. It's degrading to Mexicans, this image that they have to dress like a thug and talk hard to be a Mexican."

Countered Vargas: "It's one thing to say you are Mexican. It's another thing to show it. I'm proud of being Mexican. I fight like a warrior, like Mexicans do. People are attracted to me because of my pride.

"Look, if I didn't lose [to Trinidad], I wouldn't have this fight. De La Hoya is only fighting me because I lost to Trinidad and got knocked down a lot. But maybe it took that loss for the fans to love me like they do now."

Seating inside the Mandalay Bay was, as might be expected, a very hot ticket, with a sellout of 11,425 on hand and ringside tickets having a face value of $1,200 but being scalped for much more. Multiple story lines had already whipped fans of each man into a frenzy before the opening bell rang. Although De La Hoya – who came in at 34-2 with 27 KOs – was a tight 2-1 betting pick in the local sportsbooks, 20 of 21 credentialed boxing writers polled by the Las Vegas Review-Journal picked the favorite to emerge victorious, a veritable landslide. Among those bucking the chalk were a couple of notables, esteemed trainer Emanuel Steward and two-time heavyweight champion George Foreman, each of whom figured that the larger (although both fighters weighed in at exactly 154 pounds), presumably stronger Vargas was likely to have his hand raised if the bout ended inside the distance.

The outcome envisioned by Manny and Big George was certainly reasonable. Vargas, not always the most diligent worker in the gym, had whipped himself into phenomenal shape with the aid of a nutritionist, a first for him, along with father-figure trainer Eduardo Garcia and other physique-crafters who had transformed what sometimes had been a semi-soft midsection into rock-hard, six-pack abs. The fact that De La

De La Hoya took the best Vargas had to offer and finished his fierce rival down the stretch.

Hoya had successfully lobbied for 10-ounce gloves to be used instead of eight-ounce ones and had requested that Vargas be tested for performance-enhancing drugs beforehand lent some credence to the notion that "Ferocious" Fernando indeed had the edge in power, which would work even more in his favor if he could herd Oscar away from his comfort zone in the center of the ring and into the ropes.

"Look at this body. Look at this," Vargas said before the fight, patting his stomach. "Does De La Hoya have something like this? Does he have this?"

The first round was something of a revelation as De La Hoya did find himself fighting with his back to the ropes, where he had some shaky moments as Vargas connected with authority. It might even have appeared that the underdog would bag his quarry then and there, but, as was also the case in Rounds 3 and 5, other plus-stanzas for Vargas, the perhaps initially ring-rusty Oscar – who had been inactive for a career-long 448 days since he had wrested the WBC strap from Spain's Javier Castillejo on a wide UD – began to find his rhythm as well as spacing more to his liking. Even as he gained momentum, though, it was apparent that De La Hoya still was not clear of danger.

"Oscar De La Hoya is taking more punishment in the first five rounds of this fight than he's ever taken in five rounds of any fight!" exclaimed HBO blow-by-blow announcer Jim Lampley. "Blood's coming out of his nose, Vargas ripping him with shots along the ropes, and Fernando Vargas grins at De La Hoya as they complete Round 5!"

But De La Hoya employed his superior mobility, a busier and more accurate jab, and a newfound weapon – a normally decorative right hand mandated for more extensive use by trainer Floyd Mayweather Sr. – to claw ahead on the scorecards of judges Smith and Tucker. The strategy paid off big when Oscar called upon his preferred difference-maker, a left hook that landed flush to the jaw and sent Vargas tumbling to the canvas. A dazed Vargas beat the count, but once De La Hoya had his man on the hook, and especially this man, he wasn't about to let him wriggle off it. In a case of "turnabout is fair play," De La Hoya pinned Vargas along the ropes and teed off on him like a baseball player participating in the Home Run Derby.

"It's got to rank up there," Oscar said when asked if beating Vargas was his most satisfying victory. "I mean, Fernando Vargas is no pushover. He's a strong puncher, but I knew I was faster … At first I thought he was too strong for me, but when I was rolling and he was missing, I knew he would get tired in the later rounds.

"It feels great because of all the talk he was saying. I just got fed up with it. I wasn't going to fight him, but he got under my skin. So I told everybody that inside the ring, my fists are going to do the talking."

That might have been the end of it, just another one-and-done. Vargas, not surprisingly, loudly demanded a rematch, but his chance went up in flames after his fight-night drug test came back positive for stanozolol. He was hit with a $100,000 fine and a nine-month suspension while Oscar moved on to a defense against Yori Boy Campas and a rematch with Shane Mosley. But De La Hoya – and this is at least somewhat surprising – did make an honest effort to broker a truce with Vargas several weeks after their fight in a private meeting at a restaurant in Pasadena.

"I don't know that many people know this, but I called him to set up that meeting," De La Hoya recalled.

"I was sitting alone at a table – we had closed the restaurant for the day – waiting for Vargas. When he finally walked in, he told me, 'You didn't beat me.' All I wanted to get out of the meeting was to hug it out, let's be friends and move on. But it never got to that. So I stood up and walked away."

Vargas confirms that such a meeting took place, but he said before he and De La Hoya went their separate ways, Oscar mentioned that although he didn't recall the snowbank brouhaha, he would apologize for it and that Fernando had accepted the apology, if not necessarily The Golden Boy's insistence of a faulty memory. Maybe their frosty relationship didn't totally thaw in that fleeting moment of goodwill, but it was nonetheless an important step in the right direction.

"I forgave him and that was that," Vargas said. "Since then, we've been pretty cool. Oscar's a good dude. He wound up being a big supporter of my foundation. I have my own boxing gym and will be opening another pretty soon. I have no hard feelings toward him anymore. Whenever we see each other now, we're cordial."

Vargas has transformed himself in other ways as well. The perpetually angry young man who once spat on an opponent he had just knocked down (Ross Thompson, because Thompson had the temerity to "take it to the streets") is now training his three boxer-sons – Fernando Jr., Amado and Emiliano – who, curiously enough, have forged an unlikely friendship with Oscar's son, Devon De La Hoya.

Hey, if Ali and Frazier could eventually come to a meeting of the minds, isn't anything possible?

JED JACOBSOHN

RETURN OF THE KING

WHEN BOXING WAS IN NEED OF A MEGASTAR AND A PAY-PER-VIEW EVENT WITH CROSSOVER APPEAL, **DE LA HOYA'S** 2006 SHOWDOWN WITH **RICARDO MAYORGA** DELIVERED

By **Doug Fischer**

The year of 2005 was a compelling one for the boxing world. Future stars were on the rise, old legends were on the slide, and the top boxers faced each other enough to produce a steady stream of significant fights. Sadly, most of the action went unnoticed by the general public.

The May 7 lightweight clash between Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo produced a slugfest for the ages, but it was witnessed by 5,000 hardcore fans who could barely fill half of the Mandalay Bay Event Center in Las Vegas. Their October rematch, while heavily attended, flopped as a pay-per-view event.

However, with Oscar De La Hoya taking the year off, there were no blockbuster events, not on the level that The Golden Boy usually delivered. De La Hoya's most recent

AMANDA KELLEY

5/6/06
De La Hoya beat Ricardo Mayorga by TKO in Round 6

bout had been a bold-but-failed challenge to middleweight champ Bernard Hopkins, who stopped him in the ninth round with a body shot. Their September 2004 showdown garnered 1 million pay-per-view buys, equaling $56 million, second only to what De La Hoya's 1999 superfight with Felix Trinidad earned ($71 million) among non-heavyweight PPV events.

The highest-grossing event in 2005 was Trinidad vs. Ronald "Winky" Wright, which took place in Las Vegas one week after Corrales-Castillo I. Trinidad still had some star power, as evidenced by 510,000 PPV buys (generating $25.5 million), but the Puerto Rican hero was so thoroughly dominated by Wright that he announced his retirement shortly after the loss.

Tito wasn't the only icon to hang up his gloves in 2005. Mike Tyson fought his last fight, a humiliating stoppage to lumbering Kevin McBride, in June.

Casual fans took notice of Tyson, who had not been a PPV force since he set the record with his loss to Lennox Lewis in 2002, but still under their radar were talented and exciting young champions and titleholders, such as Floyd Mayweather Jr., Manny Pacquiao, Miguel Cotto, Zab Judah, Ricky Hatton and Jermain Taylor.

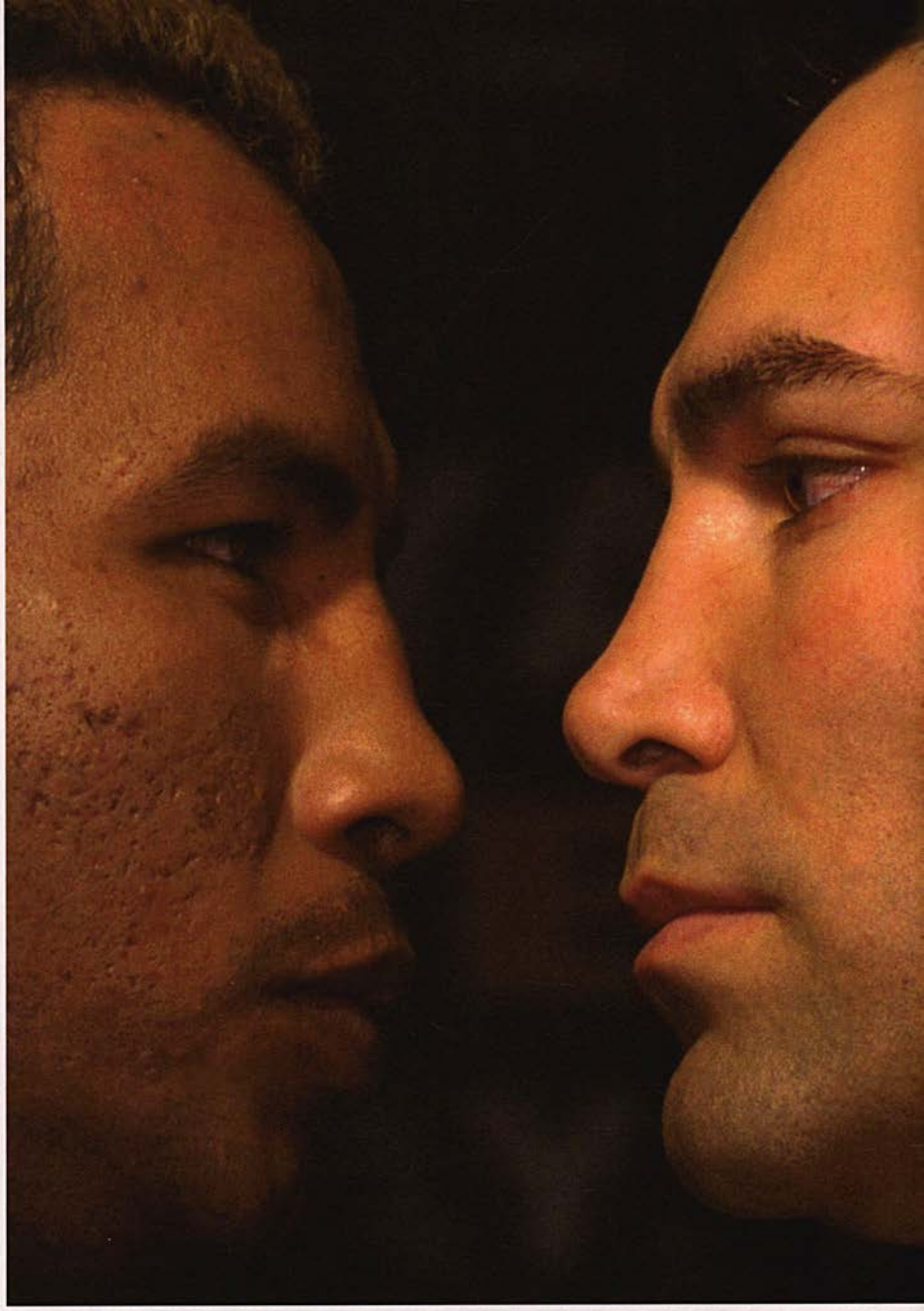
"2005 and 2006 were transition years for boxing," explained Mark Taffet, the former senior vice president of HBO Sports and head of HBO PPV. "The sport had a number of stars who in subsequent years were to become megastars, but in 2005-2006 those fighters were still rising."

Here's a refresher for those who may have forgotten (or are too young to have witnessed) those highlights:

Mayweather assumed the No. 1 spot in The Ring's 140-pound rankings with a painfully one-sided drubbing of action hero Arturo Gatti.

Pacquiao was in the midst of his trilogy with Erik Morales.

Hatton dethroned respected junior welterweight champ Kostya Tszyu.



Mayorga got under De La Hoya's skin, making for a spicy promotion.

Taylor ended Hopkins' historic middleweight title reign with back-to-back controversial decisions.

Judah was the reigning undisputed welterweight champ.

Cotto racked up title defenses with breathtaking knockouts.

If you're wondering what was up with the heavyweights, don't. The glamour division was not glamorous at this time.

Lewis and his successor, Vitali Klitschko, were retired. Wladimir Klitschko was still in his rebuilding phase following knockouts to Corrie Sanders and Lamon Brewster. Ring Magazine's heavyweight top five was a revolving door of Don King-promoted beltholders – Chris Byrd, John Ruiz, Hasim Rahman and Brewster – plus an overweight James Toney.

The once-invincible Roy Jones Jr., whose 2003 victory over Ruiz had prompted some to christen him the G.O.A.T., had been brought down to earth with back-to-back KO losses to Antonio Tarver and Glen Johnson. Jones' one fight in 2005 was a one-sided unanimous decision loss to Tarver.

Hardcore fans watched it all unfold

and were even willing to shell out an exrtra $50 for the big names, but the drama seldom received interest outside of boxing's small world.

"There were a number of matchups producing 300,000 to 500,000 pay-per-view buys, including Pacquiao-Morales, Taylor-Hopkins, Mayweather-Gatti, Tarver-Jones and Mayweather-Judah, but the sport needed its million-buy megastar to lift boxing to the level that general sports fans would be talking about," Taffet said. "That megastar was Oscar De La Hoya."

Boxing needed De La Hoya. Did De La Hoya need boxing?

Not really, at least not in 2005, according to his older brother Joel De La Hoya.

"He had married Millie (Corretjer) a couple years back (2001), and he was living the life in Puerto Rico," recalled Joel. "It really seemed like he was done with boxing as far as being a fighter. He had his promotional company, which was growing, but I think he had lost some of his passion for being in the ring.

"The rematch with (Shane) Mosley (in 2003) didn't sit well with him, especially after it was revealed that Shane took PEDs. He thought he won that fight."

After the loss to Hopkins, De La Hoya focused on starting a family with Corretjer, a famous Puerto Rican singer.

"Millie was pregnant with their first child, Little Oscar (Gabriel De La Hoya). He was just living the family life."

However, De La Hoya gradually began to feel the itch to fight again after Oscar Gabriel's birth on December 29, 2005.

But who would he target in 2006? Marketable dance partners were scarce.

His former foes were either retired, like Trinidad, or trying to climb back up the ladder. Fernando Vargas, who had been on a slow rehab from his 2002 loss to De La Hoya, and Shane Mosley, who had suffered back-to-back losses to Wright, were set to face each other in February 2006.

Wright climbed pound-for-pound rankings with the Mosley and Trinidad victories, but he lacked the boxing style or charisma to attract casual fans.

Judah was upset by Carlos Baldomir, arguably the worst Ring champ ever, in January 2006. And Mayweather and Pacquiao were still too light to challenge De La Hoya, who planned to return as a junior middleweight. (Although Mayweather, who had jumped to welterweight at the end of 2005, would get closer by targeting both Judah and Baldomir in 2006.)

Who was left? Enter Ricardo Mayorga.

The Nicaraguan wildman had unified major welterweight titles and earned the Ring championship in 2002-2003, but he made himself a marginal junior middleweight player by winning the vacant WBC 154-pound belt with a one-sided decision over Michele Piccirillo in August 2005. More important to the promotion than the green strap he held was Mayorga's personality – which was bombastic, unfiltered and extremely nasty. Vargas at the peak of his vitriolic grudge against De La Hoya was a boy scout in comparison.

"There may have been other names offered, but we settled on Mayorga because he brought a lot to the table," said Joel, an integral part of his brother's inner circle and training camps. "He had big wins against Andrew 'Six Heads' Lewis and Vernon Forrest. He went toe-to-toe with Trinidad, which was crazy, but he gave Tito a hell of a fight.

"But he was the guy to go after, because he was a bully. That was the perfect type of opponent for a comeback fight, because Oscar gets more motivated when he fights bullies."

By late February, word was out that De La Hoya would face Mayorga on May 6.

"We were thrilled to have Oscar back as we planned and looked forward to the event," said Taffet, who respected the former welterweight champ's flair for showmanship as much as his ring resume.

"Ricardo Mayorga was a cigarette-smoking, trash-talking, highly unpredictable personality who had an equally aggressive and unpredictable style that resulted in big victories. Ricardo consistently put on fan-pleasing performances."

Some fans, especially the diehards, criticized the matchup. They considered Mayorga to be "damaged goods" due to his savage 2004 encounter with Trinidad, who scored a brutal eighth-round TKO. In fact, Mayorga immediately announced his retirement and took more than a year off following the middleweight bout.

De La Hoya wasn't thought to be as beat-up as Mayorga, but his 2004 middleweight excursion wasn't any more successful and it gave him the look of a past-prime veteran. He was fortunate to get a razor-thin unanimous decision over then-unheralded WBO 160-pound titleholder Felix Sturm three months before he challenged Hopkins. Even if he was mentally up for Mayorga, the jury was out if his aging body still had "it," especially after what would be almost 20 months out of the ring.

The boxing world would find out what both fighters had left on May 6, but Taffet knew the general public would be more interested in the buildup to the fight thanks to De La Hoya's crossover appeal and Mayorga's foul mouth and pre-fight antics.

"Mayorga was the perfect comeback opponent for Oscar in that he was the anti-De La Hoya in almost every way," said Taffet, who helped market the event that would be co-promoted by De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions and Don King, who represented Mayorga.

"We named the fight 'Danger Zone' because Mayorga presented both perceived and real danger for a returning De La Hoya. At the press conference, we had yellow and black 'Danger Zone' tape, blockades and

construction helmets, which fed the theme and the mood beautifully.

"Mayorga delivered perfectly, yelling in Spanish with Tony Gonzalez (his attorney) by his side interpreting for the largely English-speaking media audience until, at one point, when Mayorga was clearly screaming about Oscar's wife – at that time Millie Corretja – Tony wouldn't dare translate what was said and instead simply whispered 'Oh dear.' We knew we had a big fight on our hands."

De La Hoya expected Mayorga to insult him throughout the coast-to-coast, multi-city press tour, but he was caught off guard by how personal the verbal attacks were once they were face to face.

"He really got under Oscar's skin by talking about his manhood, about Millie and his Mexican heritage," said Joel. "You know how Oscar is; he's usually happy-go-lucky, nothing bothers him, but once Mayorga went after his family, it got personal. He didn't give a shit about what was said about him; he never did. But when you get the family involved, that's a no-no in his book."

Mayorga set an amped-up, ugly tone for the promotion at the Southern California presser, which was held in a small ballroom inside the Regent Beverly Wilshire hotel in Beverly Hills:

"Tell your wife to fuck you the morning of the fight so you don't take a dive like you did vs. Hopkins, faggot!" Mayorga yelled as he grabbed his crotch.

"Remember, I'm the champ! You don't even know how to represent your own people. Mexicans in East L.A. are telling me to kick your ass!"

De La Hoya remained silent for most of Mayorga's tirade, but was clearly agitated when he finally responded at the podium.

"You disrespected the two things I love," he said. "First, you disrespected my wife. Now you mention my race. This isn't a game. I'm going to knock you out."

De La Hoya carried a new intensity back to Puerto Rico, where his training camp resumed with Floyd Mayweather Sr. in charge as head coach.

"Without a doubt, Mayorga's trash talk lit a fire under his ass," said Joel. "That was good because it made him work harder, but we didn't want him to overtrain or stray from our game plan, which was to stick and move.

"We brought in the toughest local guys to spar with him so he could work on that. We didn't want Oscar to stand and trade with Mayorga, because we knew he was dangerous. We saw what he did to Vernon Forrest. I watched Mayorga's fight videos with Floyd Sr. and we saw that he loaded up with everything. We knew Oscar had to be cautious of those big looping punches and catch him in between. But we wanted him to pop that jab and move side to side to get him off balance first."

Mayorga tried his best to get De La Hoya off balance by telling the media that he would try his best to "stop his heart or detach his retina." He stepped up his chaotic tactics the week of the fight, which took place at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, by threatening to pull out if his purse wasn't increased from a guaranteed $2 million to $8 million (equal to De La Hoya's guarantee).

Of course, Mayorga was bluffing about not fighting, but De La Hoya assured the media he was serious about going for the knockout.

"It's nice to hear that he has so much hate for me," Mayorga told boxing media the week of the fight. "We'll see if he demonstrates how much hate he has toward me by standing in the middle of the ring fighting with me."

Mayorga got his wish just under one minute into the opening round.

De La Hoya jabbed to the body, forcing Mayorga to drop his hands, allowing for a right cross, which set up a short hook just as Mayorga was winding up with a sweeping hook of his own. Boom! A twisting Mayorga was deposited to the seat of his trunks.

Mayorga got up, more embarrassed than hurt, but he instantly realized that he wasn't going to have to chase De La Hoya on this night.

"All of the stick-and-move strategy we worked on in Puerto Rico went out the window in the opening round," said Joel. "[Oscar] went out there and threw caution to the wind; he went out there to bully the bully.

"That was nothing that we worked on. That was just Oscar saying, 'All right, let's see who's got the biggest balls.'"

They both had big balls, as well as granite chins. The fight would go rounds, but De La Hoya's tighter technique and superior speed, timing and punch accuracy would be the difference in a one-sided but entertaining scrap.

De La Hoya remained laser-focused and in the pocket following the opening-round knockdown. A shaken Mayorga defiantly launched haymakers, most of which De La Hoya calmly blocked with his gloves and forearms.

"I felt confident," De La Hoya told Mario Lopez during a 2020 DAZN feature that reviewed the Mayorga fight. "I felt that I had his timing, I could see his punches coming, but he was still dangerous. He still hit hard. He could still knock me out. But I had so much anger. I wanted to finish him off.

"I couldn't do it in the early rounds because he had such a good chin, but every punch I threw, I threw with bad intentions."

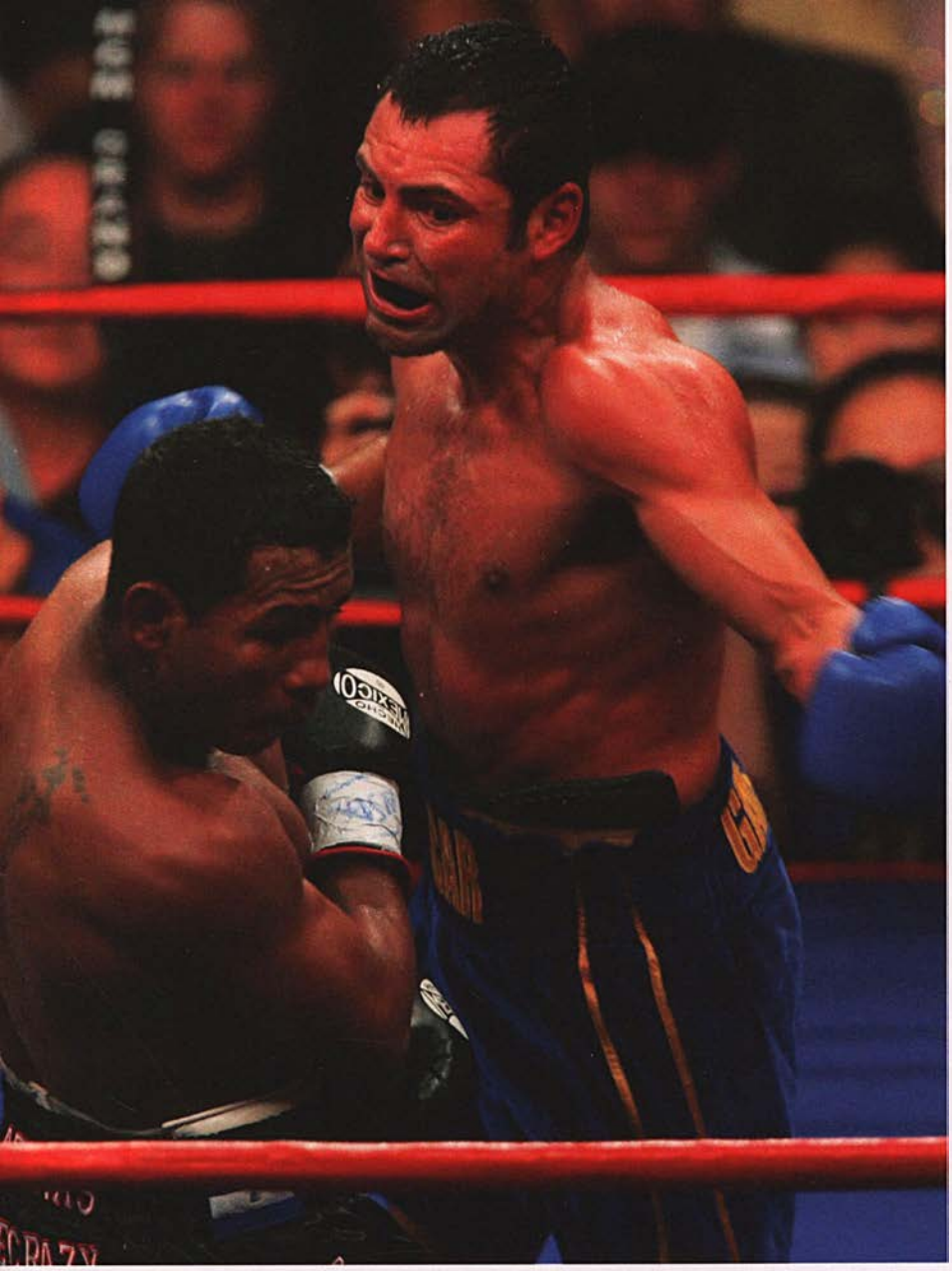
Between rounds, De La Hoya said he caught an earful from Mayweather Sr.

"Floyd Sr. yells, 'What the hell are you doing? You should have knocked him out!'

"I'm thinking, 'No, let him come. I'm gonna make him suffer. I'm gonna let him go a few rounds and I'm gonna make him pay.'"

De La Hoya did that over the next five rounds – stalking forward behind a high guard, sharp jabs, sneaky right crosses and his ever-present left hooks – but not without risk.

Mayorga gave ground but didn't



De La Hoya shocked Mayorga – and thrilled fans – by going on the attack early.

give up trying to knock De La Hoya's block off, even after he'd been momentarily wobbled by multi-punch combinations, which was often.

"He kept talking shit and he kept throwing bombs," De La Hoya told Lopez.

They traded flush hooks, uppercuts and body shots. De La Hoya later admitted that some of the punches he took stiffened his legs, but it was Mayorga who was worn down.

One minute into the sixth round, De La Hoya stunned and staggered Mayorga into the ropes, where the weary bully took a knee and grabbed the center rope to steady himself. Pride got him to his feet, but he did so with a resigned look on his face. He realized that De La Hoya's prediction was about to come true.

To Mayorga's credit, he went out on his shield. This wasn't Hector Camacho playing the "bad guy" role to hype an event and collect a payday. Mayorga really tried to win, but he was outclassed and ultimately overwhelmed along the ropes amid a fusillade of punches.

The MGM Grand Garden Arena exploded as referee Jay Nady jumped in to save Mayorga at the 1:25 mark.

"That victory turned out to be one of the biggest moments of Oscar's career," said Joel. "The elation we felt, the energy we got from the fans in that moment, it was up there with the wins over Chavez, Whitaker, Vargas.

"It was a special victory because it felt like it was for the De La Hoya family. I remember it was the only time my son, Joel Jr., who was more of a Shane Mosley fan than of Oscar, wanted to get in the ring and congratulate his uncle. We all wanted to celebrate that win like no other."

It would be the final world title victory of De La Hoya's career, but it proved he was still a fighter to be reckoned with. The performance of the pay-per-view event – which garnered 925,000 pay-per-view buys, generating $46.3 million – confirmed that De La Hoya was still a megastar.

Some thought the victory was the perfect note for De La Hoya to retire on, but most knew that it would lead to better opponents and bigger goals.

"Oscar De La Hoya was noncommittal regarding his future following his spectacular knockout of Ricardo Mayorga. But I would be astounded if he never fights again," Ring Magazine Editor-in-Chief Nigel Collins penned in his Ringside column, published a few weeks after the fight.

"Don't think for one moment that Oscar didn't enjoy beating the crap out of Mayorga. The Mayorga mauling has reminded De La Hoya just how potent of an elixir such an emphatic victory can be, and he won't want to let it go before at least one final fix.

"If there is a problem, it is finding the right opponent. Though the pay-per-view public would probably buy it, Oscar's ego will not permit another fight against a Mayorga-type. The next fight must be a bigger challenge against somebody who will push De La Hoya to be the best that he can be, perhaps for the last time. In other words, somebody like Floyd Mayweather."

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THE PERFECT STORM

DE LA HOYA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE RING WERE HALL OF FAME-WORTHY, BUT TALENT ALONE ISN'T WHAT MADE HIM ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR BOXERS OF ALL TIME

By Michael Rosenthal

Former HBO executive Mark Taffet was chatting with former heavyweight champion George Foreman on a New York-bound train during a promotional tour for Big George's fight against Tommy Morrison in June 1993.

The conversation centered on pay-per-view, which was in its infancy at the time.

"I wish I were 10 years younger," the 44-year-old Foreman said. "The pay-per-view boom is going to change the sport. And do you know who's going to benefit from that?" He paused and pointed. "That kid sitting a few rows in front of us."

That kid was Oscar De La Hoya, who was scheduled to face Troy Dorsey in his eighth fight on the Foreman-Morrison card. And Foreman was right about him.

De La Hoya would become the pretty face of boxing after Mike Tyson began to decline a few years later, which translated to international fame and a fortune in earnings largely as a result of pay-per-view.

What was it about De La Hoya that catapulted him to that position? What did he have that others at the time didn't? The appropriate question might be, "What *didn't* he have?"

Let's take an inventory of his assets:

THE PERFECT STORM

- He was impossibly good-looking, which attracted a new demographic to boxing: women.
- He was a 1992 Olympic gold medalist when that still meant something among mainstream sports fans. Hence, his enduring nickname, "The Golden Boy."
- He had a compelling backstory, promising his dying mother that he'd win an Olympic championship and then dedicating it to her after she was gone.
- He was bilingual, a key element in his ability to become a crossover star in the English- and Spanish-speaking markets.
- His timing was good. He arrived around the time the Latino market was starting to boom.
- He had one of the greatest promoters of all time, Bob Arum, who, with his team, put all the elements together to build a superstar.
- And he had the quality necessary to make all of the above relevant: He could fight. He won major titles in six divisions and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2014.

Call De La Hoya the "perfect storm."

"Oscar was Mexican-American," said Taffet, who would become HBO's pay-per-view guru. "He came onto the scene with an Olympic gold medal at just the time that Latino population, income and media growth was booming in the U.S. That was the perfect storm. Not only was he an exciting fighter with great accomplishments, he also had consumer and media stages that were ready to be exploited, just as Oscar did.

"We were truly fortunate to have all that come at the same time."

Another attractive trait De La Hoya brought to the table was passion that ultimately would inspire his fans and a sense of destiny, both of which were evident from a young age.

Eric Gomez, president of De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions, grew up with his boss in East Los Angeles in the 1980s. He remembers a sixth-grade class assignment in which the students were instructed to write an essay about what they wanted to do for a living and then read it in front of their classmates.

Most of the kids chose typical professions – fireman, police officer, lawyer, doctor. De La Hoya, around 11 at the time, went a different direction.

"I think I wrote that I wanted to be a fireman," Gomez told The Ring. "Others wanted to be other things. Oscar said he wanted to win a gold medal in the Olympics and be a boxing world champion. All the kids laughed. And the teacher got upset. She felt he didn't take the assignment seriously and kept him after class.

"I remember seeing him crying. And I remember thinking for the first time, 'Man, this guy is serious about this.' I realized then that he had this passion, this dream."

Gomez remembers another thing about his classmate: The girls were drawn to him.

"He was shy but [the girls] weren't," he said. "They were sort of aggressive sometimes because he was a good-looking kid. He definitely caught the girls' eye."

That never changed. And Arum and Co. would exploit it to the fullest.

I tagged along on the nationwide promotional tour for De La Hoya's first fight with Mexican icon Julio Cesar Chavez, in 1996. The then-23-year-old and I shared a van heading from the airport to the next press conference at a hotel in El Paso, Texas. Nothing was out of the ordinary, as the streets were eerily quiet.

Then we turned a corner as we approached the hotel and let out a collective gasp: An estimated 800 people – mostly wide-eyed young women – stood restlessly behind barricades as a few local police officers tried to keep them at bay.

As the van pulled into the parking area and De La Hoya stepped out – maybe 50, 60 meters from the fans – the crowd broke through the barricades and made a mad dash toward the object of their affection. He only had time to yell as he smiled, "Here they come!" before he was enveloped and swept away.

"Every stop he was like a rock star. All I could think of was footage I'd seen as a kid of The Beatles," Taffet said.

Arum had another story about De La Hoya and El Paso, whose population is around 80 percent Latino.

"I remember in El Paso, at the Sun Bowl," Arum said. "It was one of these stupid mandatories against a French guy named [Patrick] Charpentier [in 1998]. I thought, 'How the hell are we going to sell this thing? The French guy is awful.' And then I looked into the stands and there were at least 50 percent women, young girls, some carrying signs that said, 'Marry me, Oscar!'

"We helped in the beginning with that, playing up his looks. I was older than most people in the business. I remembered how Frank Sinatra was sold in the beginning of his singing career. When he opened at the Paramount Theatre in New York, they hired girls to shriek at Sinatra. Then, with Oscar, it took on a life of its own. The women loved him."

The fact he could communicate fluently in the second language of many of those women – first language, in some cases – shouldn't be underestimated.

De La Hoya's parents, Joel Sr. and Cecilia, immigrated to the United States before De La Hoya was born. Thus, they spoke Spanish in the home, unwittingly providing their son with a skill that was valuable in more than one way.

"I really believed that Oscar could become something big the first time-

FRAZER HARRISON

De La Hoya has been dating sportscaster, entrepreneur and model Holly Sonders since the summer of 2021.

I met him," Arum said. "I saw that the kid was good-looking. And he was fluent in both languages. That was something I hadn't seen. ... Had that happened four, five years earlier, I wouldn't have paid much attention. But as an eastern guy who had moved out west, I was becoming aware of the overwhelming number of young Hispanics who were fight fans. ... It was a whole new audience. He really attracted people to the sport, both Hispanics and English-speaking fans.

"I remember [former head of HBO Sports] Seth Abraham sent me a cartoon he'd seen in The New Yorker. It said something like the ideal man is a combination of Oscar De La Renta and Oscar De La Hoya. In other words, in addition to the huge Hispanic audience he attracted, he worked his way into the mainstream."

And De La Hoya didn't speak in two languages just to prove he could do it. He had something to say, which made him a darling of the media and enhanced his appeal.

I attended a number of media days at his Big Bear training camp in the mountains of Southern California, which sometimes attracted dozens of journalists – before the internet age – even though it was a two-hour drive from central Los Angeles.

The television and radio outlets would set up cameras and microphones several meters apart outside his gym and De La Hoya would go from one to the next until everyone was satisfied. And they always were. The shy kid from East L.A. had evolved into a charming, media-savvy young man.

"He always knew the right thing to say," Arum said. "I would give him a theme as part of the promotion. He could expand on the theme and put it in his own words. And it would come out beautifully. That was real talent."

De La Hoya (39-6, 30 KOs) also delivered for his fans when it came time to fight.

First, the six-division titleholder avoided no one, even though he was criticized by some early in his career for being protected. More than half of his total fights as a professional were with former or current champions, against whom he went 20-6. Among his victims: Genaro Hernandez, Jesse James Leija, Chavez (twice), Pernell Whitaker, Ike Quartey, Fernando Vargas and Ricardo Mayorga.

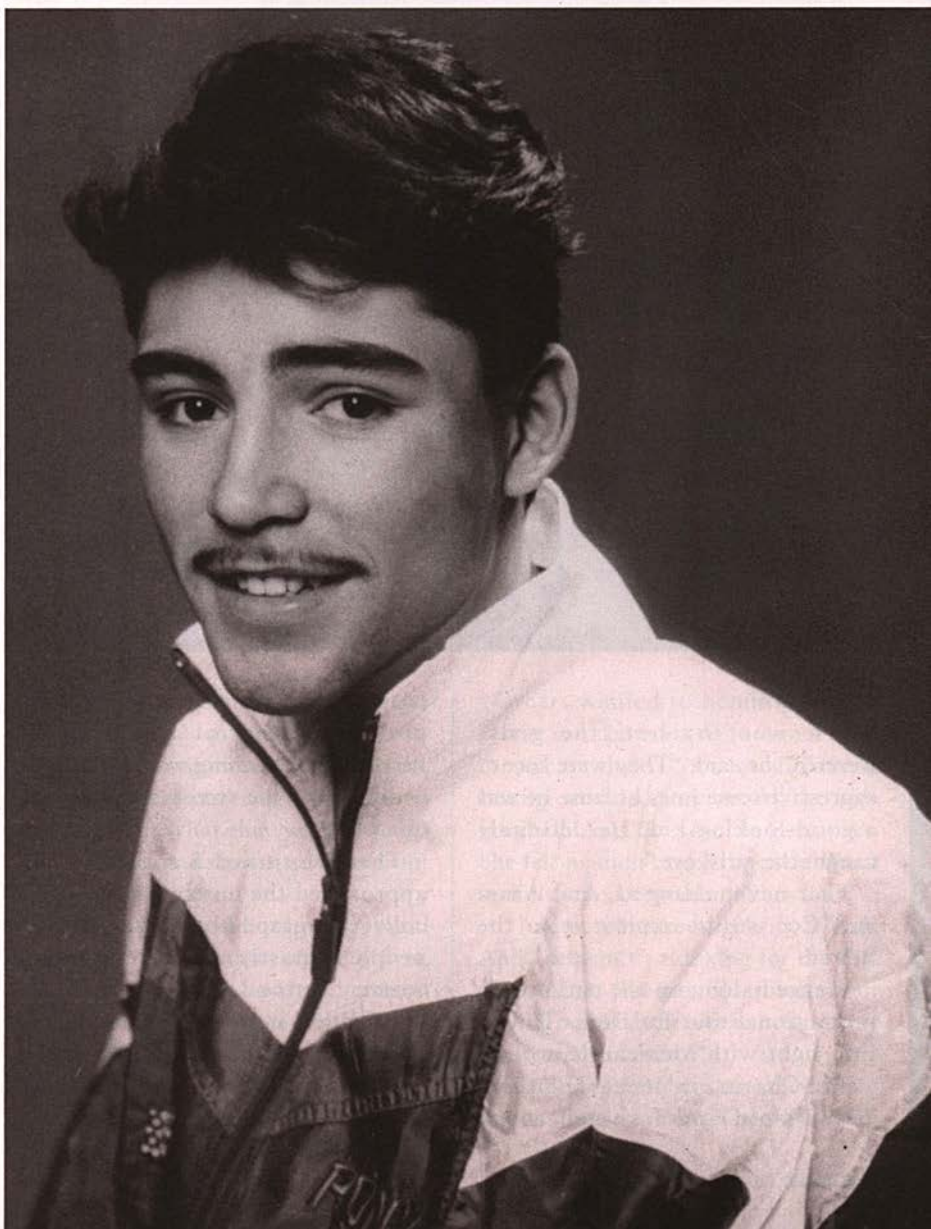
"He certainly had all the other attributes," Arum said. "He just had to be able to fight. And we learned early on that he could. He was a terrific fighter."

And while he lost a number of his biggest fights – to Shane Mosley (twice), Felix Trinidad, Bernard Hopkins, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao – the excitement and drama he delivered kept the fans coming back.

Even outside-of-the-ring missteps – and there were plenty – didn't change that. The fans always supported him.

Taffet believes De La Hoya's absolute peak in popularity came in 1997, when he defeated Miguel Angel Gonzalez, Whitaker, David Kamau, Hector Camacho and Wilfredo Rivera.

And that busy schedule was no accident. Arum and Co. knew that he was sizzling hot after his passing-of-the-torch victory over Chavez the previous year. They wanted to drive home the notion that he had become



The boyish Olympian would become the man as a professional.

Ryan Garcia has the potential to follow in the footsteps of his promoter.

the face of the sport, which they accomplished by showcasing him five times in one calendar year.

"I remember Arum spent a lot of time talking about this," Taffet said. "The master plan. After Oscar won the fight with Chavez, we laid down an aggressive plan to do as many fights as possible in 1997 to permanently establish Oscar as a superstar in the marketplace.

"... That was a specific strategic move that we worked on with Arum. It's an example of Bob's brilliance."

The pay-per-view numbers that Foreman predicted De La Hoya would generate don't lie. He did 330,000 buys in his first pay-per-view bout, against Rafael Ruelas in 1995. Two years later he and Whitaker generated 720,000 buys. And he peaked at a then-non-heavyweight-record 2.4 million against Mayweather in 2007.

In all, a reported 19 pay-per-view fights generated almost 14 million buys and $700 million. That made him the pay-per-view king until he was dethroned by Mayweather and Pacquiao, who delivered a reported 4.6 million buys and $410 million for their 2015 showdown alone.

Still, when Arum was asked how De La Hoya compared to Mayweather and Pacquiao in terms of his drawing power, he gave a surprising answer: "He was bigger than both of them."

How is that possible? De La Hoya did have good timing when it came to pay-per-view, as Foreman had suggested. However, it wasn't perfect timing. The number of homes with access to pay-per-view around 15-25 years ago – De La Hoya's peak period – paled next to the universe in which Mayweather and Pacquiao met.

In other words, Arum believes that if De La Hoya had hit his peak at the same time as Mayweather and Pacquiao, he would've done bigger numbers with the right foil.

"Pay-per-view was just taking off," he said. "There weren't as many homes and so forth. Oscar to my mind was a bigger draw on pay-per-view than either Pacquiao or Mayweather. Of course, I could say the same for George Foreman. He did 1.4 [million] against Evander Holyfield in 1991. That was a huge number at the time. And imagine what [Muhammad] Ali and [Sugar Ray] Leonard would've done.

"They were all the biggest of their time, though. That's all you can ask."

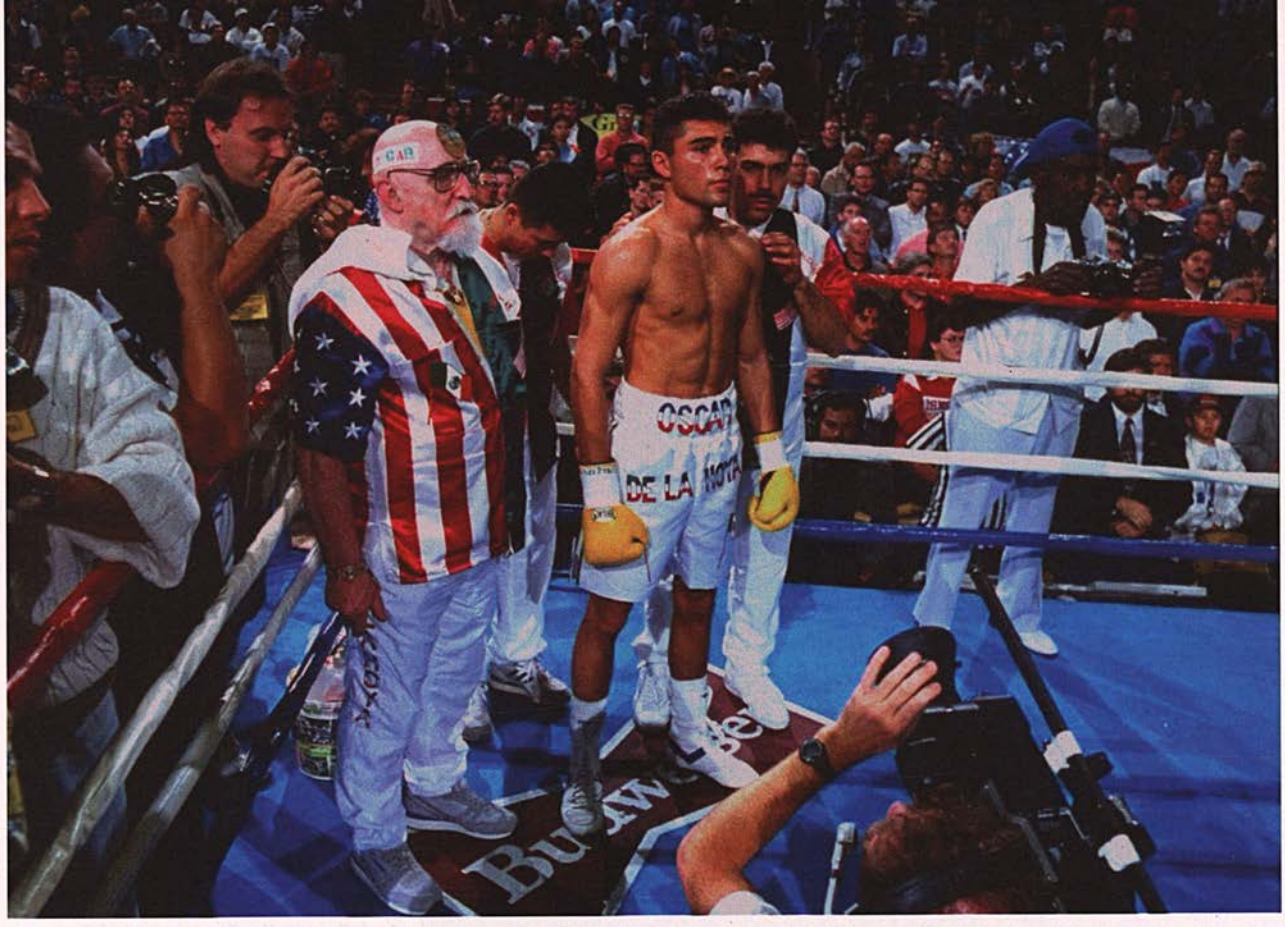
Of course, Gomez could never have imagined what his childhood friend would evolve into, his homework assignment aside. He remembers a low-key boy who sometimes complained that he had to go to the gym rather than play with his friends.

Gomez watched that kid evolve into one of his country's greatest amateurs, an elite professional and genuine superstar who will remain a central part of boxing lore for as long as people talk about the sport.

Even now, 14 years after his retirement and well into his second career as a promoter, everyone over a certain age knows Oscar De La Hoya.

"He's still very popular," Gomez said. "When he goes to any boxing event, in Vegas, in any fight town, they still cheer him on. The kids might not know, but their parents do. He's one of those rare people, like Ali, Leonard, international stars. They all have that transcending appeal. Oscar has that.

"That little kid had a dream and stuck to it and worked for it. That's special."



OSCAR DE LA HOYA: GREATEST HITS

LOOKING BACK ON HIS INCREDIBLE PATH FROM OLYMPIC CHAMPION TO BOXING ICON, **THE GOLDEN BOY** REVISITS SIX CAREER-DEFINING FIGHTS

By Anson Wainwright

Oscar De La Hoya was born in East Los Angeles on February 4, 1973. His beginnings were particularly humble.

"I grew up in East L.A. surrounded by drugs and gangs," De La Hoya told The Ring. "It was tough, but luckily I had boxing to keep me away from all of that. Boxing gave me everything I have today. I owe everything to boxing."

His grandfather boxed as an amateur, then his father boxed professionally. Oscar followed in their footsteps and began his own journey at age 6.

De La Hoya thrived as an amateur and won a slew of national titles to book a place on the U.S. Olympic team at the 1992 Barcelona Games. There, his victory in the midst of grieving for his mother captivated viewers.

"The Olympics are a worldwide stage that catapulted me to superstardom," De La Hoya said. "The gold medal to me will always be the biggest accomplishment that I've ever captured in my boxing career. I won world titles in six different weight classes, but the gold medal by far will be my biggest accomplishment inside the ring."

After making his pro debut with a first-round knockout in November 1992, De La Hoya was extremely active, fighting 11 times through the first 16 months of his new career. He regularly showcased his talents on prime undercard spots and gained the requisite experience before landing a fight with Jimmi Bredahl for the relatively new WBO junior lightweight title. De La Hoya claimed the first of his many belts by 10th-round stoppage in March 1994.

"The Golden Boy" wasn't without his detractors, who questioned if he had the substance to go with his matinee idol looks and charisma. They pointed to

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EQUIPMENT

De La Hoya picked up his second world title at the expense of Jorge Paez.

the ignominy of a trip to the canvas against unbeaten but unheralded Giorgio Campanella, whom De La Hoya stopped in three rounds in his first title defense. Those critics would dwindle in number as De La Hoya moved up to lightweight, where he collected the vacant WBO title against Jorge Paez (KO 2) in July 1994 and then staged a series of four high-profile victories in 1995.

Junior welterweight and a clash with boyhood hero Julio Cesar Chavez was next, giving De La Hoya the opportunity to take down a living legend. The success continued at welterweight, starting with Pernell Whitaker in April 1997 and extending through seven defenses against the likes of Hector Camacho and Ike Quartey.

His popularity was very much in evidence during this stretch when over 40,000 fans came to the Sun Bowl in El Paso to watch him thrash unknown mandatory challenger Patrick Charpentier in three rounds.

"Oscar was ability and marketability personified, a rock star wherever he fought in those days, but he never fought in Mexico," said Bruce Trampler, who was the matchmaker for De La Hoya during his time at Top Rank. "The closest he came was El Paso, right on the border across the Rio Grande from Juarez, and his fans responded with a huge advance ticket sale. If we had another 10,000 seats to sell, they would have been gone as well."

It all helped build up a superfight with longtime IBF ruler Felix Trinidad, but "Tito" would finally bring The Golden Boy's winning streak to an end.

More iconic fights would follow. The SoCal showdown with Shane Mosley. The bitter grudge match with Fernando Vargas.

After De La Hoya lost his titles to Mosley in their rematch, he decided to step up to middleweight. He edged past Felix Sturm (UD 12) in controversial fashion to claim the WBO title in his first fight at the weight.

That set up a fight with Bernard Hopkins in 2004 to crown the undisputed middleweight champion. Early on, De La Hoya's sharpness and speed gave Hopkins trouble in a tactical battle. However, Hopkins broke through and landed a debilitating left hook to the body that stopped De La Hoya in Round 9.

In the twilight of his career, De La Hoya lost to boxing superstars Floyd Mayweather Jr. (SD 12) and Manny Pacquiao (TKO 8) before retiring with a record of 39-6 (30 KOs).

Looking back, De La Hoya is particularly proud of the statue of himself that stands outside the Crypto.com Arena (formerly Staples Center).

"We were able to be honored with a statue outside the Crypto.com Arena to commemorate my long-lasting career here in Los Angeles," he said. "The fact we were the first ones to stage an event at the arena was very special. It's not bad company (the statue is beside others of sporting superstars Magic Johnson and Wayne Gretzky) and it goes to show you that L.A. is very rich in sports and they appreciate their sports heroes. So it's a pretty nice feeling to have that statue."

Since retiring in 2008, De La Hoya has battled personal demons. He hopes he can put them behind him.

"Just to be at peace with myself – that's my goal," said the 2014 International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee. "To leave a legacy outside the ring that I'm happy, that I'm satisfied with, and that's the relationship with myself."

De La Hoya, now 49, is a father to six children and lives in Los Angeles, where the company he founded, Golden Boy Promotions, is based.

However, it is his work away from sports in the local community that he feels is most worthwhile.

"My foundation is my baby; we helped build several cancer centers in East Los Angeles," he said. "Through my foundation, I built a high school for kids called the Oscar De La Hoya High School, which is one of the more successful high schools in the greater Los Angeles area for inner-city kids.

"It's been a wonderful ride. I've been able to do a lot of great things for a lot of people. It's been a lot of fun and it's not over yet."

De La Hoya looked back on his career and reminisced about six career-defining performances for the readers of The Ring:

JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ

June 7, 1996, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • Title: WBC junior welterweight

"We sparred when I was 14 years old. He was getting ready for Meldrick Taylor. It was the last week of his preparation and he wanted to just loosen up and focus on losing the weight. He wanted three small guys to help him with speed, so they called me, Sugar Shane Mosley and another friend of ours, Pepe Reilly. That was the very first time [I met Chavez].

"The reason [our fight] was so impactful on my career is because it was the first time that fans were criticizing me, that fans were against me, going up against a Mexican legend like Julio. It was different for my career and what I was so used to.

"Plus, everything that happened around the fight with the Mexican government, the Mexican cartel. What happened was he was training in Culiacan, Mexico, and I was training in Big Bear, California, and I was getting threats almost every day. I was getting threats from the government saying if I beat Julio, I could never go into Mexico again. A lot of distractions – tons and tons of distractions.

"I remember getting inside the ring and looking at Julio Cesar Chavez across the ring and telling myself, 'Oh my gosh, that's my hero.' It could have been very distracting, but I was able to hold it together and stick to my game plan. [The experience of sparring Chavez] helped me stay away from his right hand. He hit me with a right hand that almost put me to my knee. I cut him early with a left jab, but my boxing ability that night [was on point]. Nobody could beat me that night.

"It solidified me as a top, top fighter. I was fighting very often, so I had one week off and I had to go back to the mountain to train. I was with family and friends and right back to business."

RESULT: DE LA HOYA TKO 4

IKE QUARTEY

February 13, 1999, Thomas & Mack Center, Las Vegas • Title: WBC welterweight

"Nobody wanted to fight Ike Quartey, nobody knew him, so I volunteered.

"Three weeks before [the original November 1998 fight date], I got cut in sparring, so I had to take two weeks off. I went into the [rescheduled] fight thinking it was going to be easy. At that time, I was unstoppable at welterweight. I would have to say it was the toughest fight of my career.

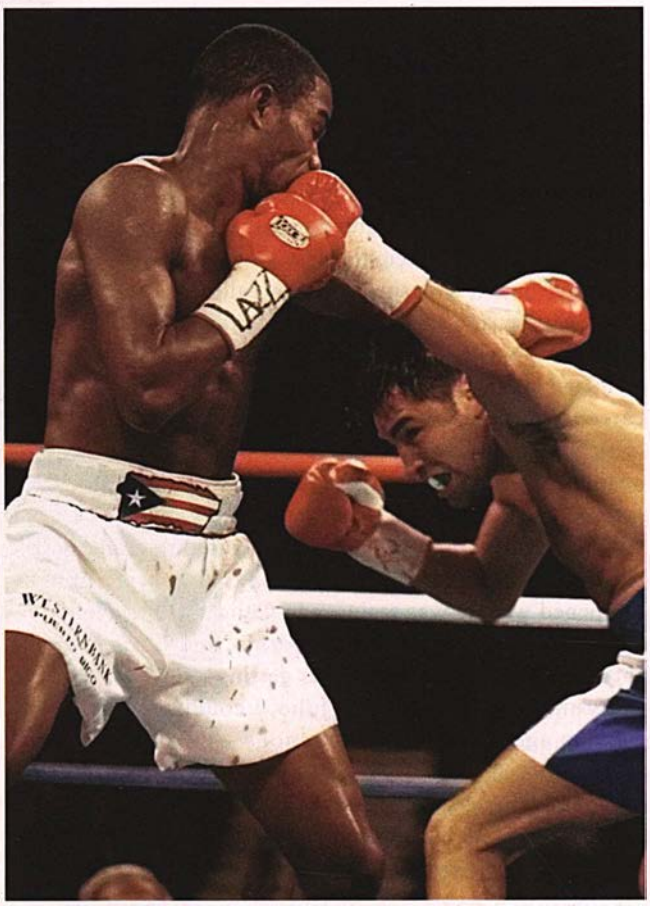
"Ike Quartey hit like a sledgehammer and had a beautiful jab. That sixth round [we both went down] was incredible, but the 12th round was amazing. What was very impressive was his chin. The last round when he was on the ropes, I couldn't believe how he was still standing up. I must have hit him with 25 punches unanswered and I couldn't believe the referee didn't stop the fight. That was a classic.

"I took an Uber yesterday and the driver was from Ghana. He was so excited, and I asked him about Ike Quartey and he told me that Ike Quartey is doing very well. He's happily retired. He's building a hospital in Ghana. I'm very happy for him."

RESULT: DE LA HOYA SD 12

FELIX TRINIDAD

September 18, 1999, Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF/WBC welterweight



"I had the late, great Gil Clancy in my corner and we trained for three months up in Big Bear, and every single day Gil Clancy would remind me, 'You have to box Trinidad. Box him, box him, box him. Do not let him hit you, because he hits hard.' So for three whole months, we trained to box Trinidad.

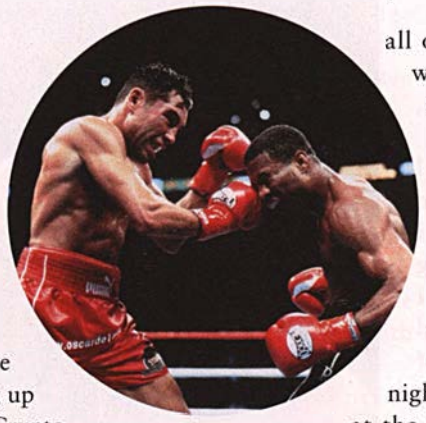
"Two weeks before the fight, the last day I was in Big Bear, we're doing our normal running routine in the morning, we're running the mountain and as we're running down, I twist my ankle. I rolled my ankle. It was bad; it ballooned up like a tennis ball. So I couldn't spar anymore, I couldn't run anymore. I could maybe shadowbox. So when we got to the fight, I had to wrap my ankle with duct tape.

"I'm boxing him, I'm winning the fight. It's a fairly easy fight, the first nine rounds. The last three rounds, Gil Clancy starts yelling at me, telling me, 'Box the last three rounds, get on your bicycle and box the last three rounds.' So I did and got the fight stolen away from me. I was more disappointed in myself that I didn't listen to my instinct. Normally I close the show, and I listened to Gil Clancy, and Don King was able to take away the fight from me. It made me think I have to always go with my instinct and always go for the kill. There were talks of a rematch, but Don King didn't want to."

RESULT: TRINIDAD MD 12

SHANE MOSLEY

June 17, 2000, Staples Center, Los Angeles • Title: WBC welterweight



"Me and Shane went back since we were 9, 10 years old. We fought one time [as amateurs] – I believe he beat me. I'd always knew Shane Mosley was a very difficult and dangerous fighter that nobody wanted to fight at the time. What made it special was opening up the Staples Center, now known as the Crypto.com Arena. The event was bigger than the [Academy Awards]. Everybody was there – you name it. It was star-studded and the fight lived up to its expectations.

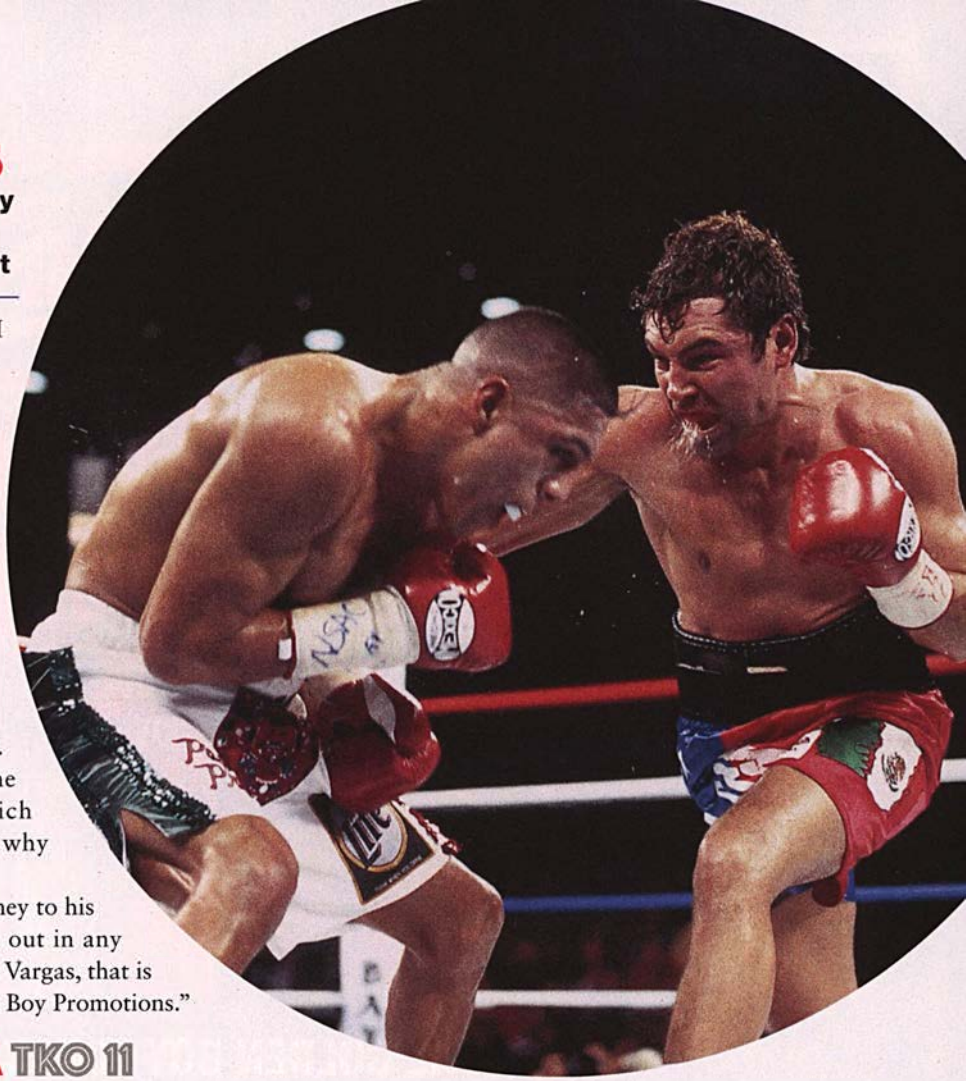
"I knew it was going to be a tough fight. What people don't know ... (laughs) After I made the weight on Friday, since I was fighting at home in Los Angeles, I told my team, 'Let's go back to my neighborhood where I grew up and close down a restaurant and have music and celebrate making weight.' It was friends and family, mariachi [music] playing. I ordered 24 oysters; I eat 'em all. I go back to my room later that evening at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and all of a sudden my stomach starts feeling weird and I start feeling nauseous and I start throwing up and I have diarrhea. The whole night I couldn't sleep, I'm vomiting, diarrhea. I wake up in the morning and I'm sick as a dog. I weighed myself on a scale I had in my room and I had lost four pounds. So instead of gaining weight [after the weigh-in], I lost four pounds.

"In the dressing room that night, fight night, I'm telling Bob Arum, my promoter at the time, 'I can't fight. I can't do it. I'm sick.' I touched my stomach with my finger and it's sore. I cannot possibly fight with Shane Mosley; he's a dangerous fighter. Push comes to shove. I decided to fight. I knew it was a war and was going to be difficult, but the whole time I was worried about Shane Mosley hitting me in the stomach – the whole time. But it was still an entertaining fight. I couldn't box correctly; I was always thinking about my stomach and being in pain, but it was still a great fight."

RESULT: MOSLEY SD 12

FERNANDO VARGAS

September 14, 2002, Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring/ WBA/WBC junior middleweight



"The whole 'Bad Blood' thing, I strongly believe it was his way to get motivated to hate me. It was his way to pump himself up, because I had no grudge whatsoever against him.

"He was a very tough fighter. He was probably one of the hardest punchers I've ever faced. He almost had me knocked out in the first round through the ropes. That's where I had to show my true heart and really dig down deep inside. It was a classic fight where I was able to knock him out in the 11th round. We find out two weeks later that he had taken anabolic steroids, which obviously answered my question of why he was so strong.

"We're friends. I always donate money to his foundation. I always try to help him out in any way. He has a fighter, his son Emiliano Vargas, that is amazing, that I want to sign to Golden Boy Promotions."

RESULT: DE LA HOYA TKO 11

MANNY PACQUIAO

December 6, 2008, MGM Grand, Las Vegas • Non-title fight

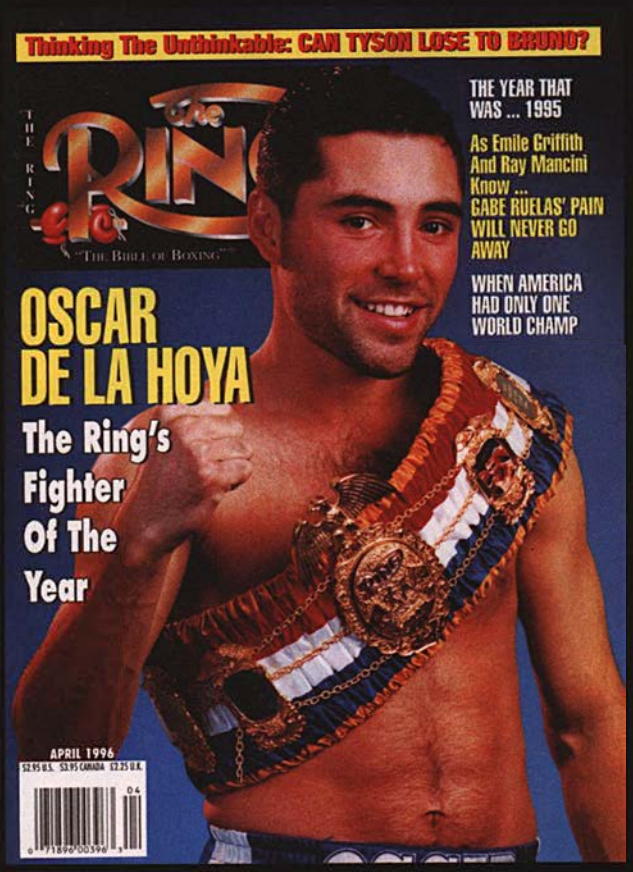
"There's so many [big fights], but I'm going to go with Pacquiao. The final fight of my career. What people tend to forget, I went up to fight Bernard Hopkins at 160. After the fight, I try to come back down to 147 and fight Pacquiao. Obviously cutting that much weight in boxing is a no-no, but what people don't know is I weighed [145] for that fight because I had bad nutrition. I had hired a new nutritionist, a new trainer, and everything went wrong. I lost a lot of muscle. Plus my age – I was already older.

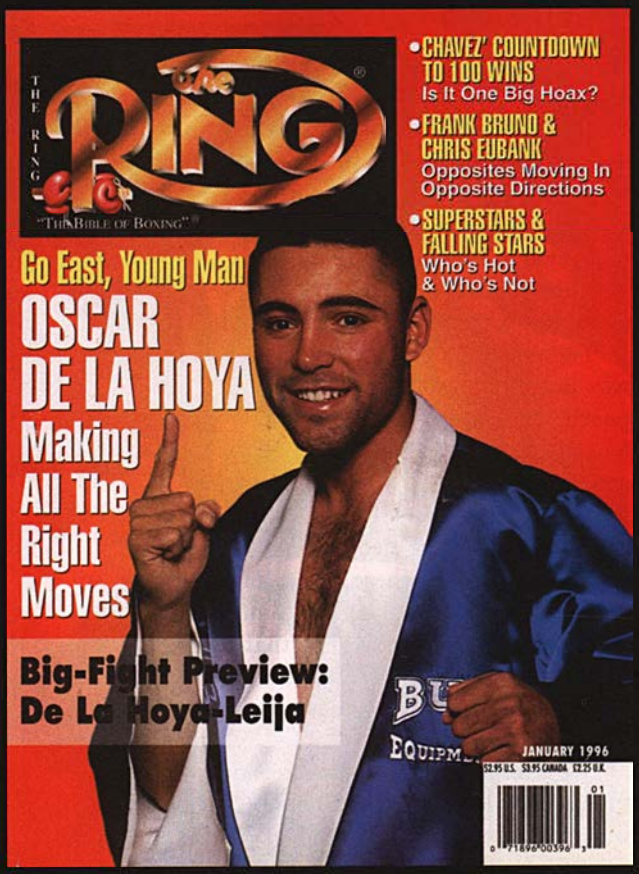
"I fought this kid who nobody knew and his name was Manny Pacquiao, and a star was born. He captured the moment. He became the superstar he is today. It was a thrilling career for me and I was able to hang them up, not at the best moment I wanted to, but I knew that was the end. I tried [to fight everybody]. The reason I didn't fight Vernon Forrest was because he got knocked out by [Ricardo] Mayorga, and I fought Mayorga." (laughs)

RESULT: PACQUIAO TKO 8

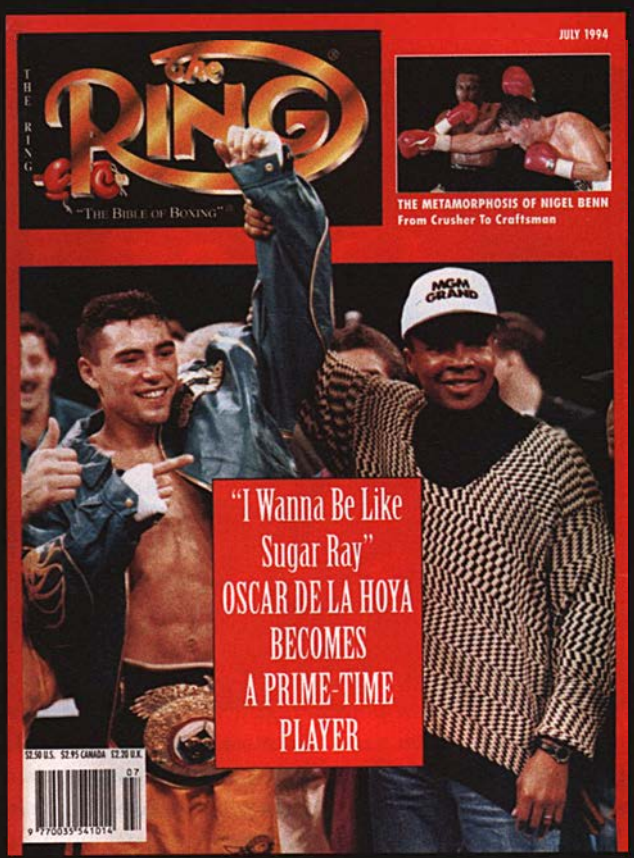
Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

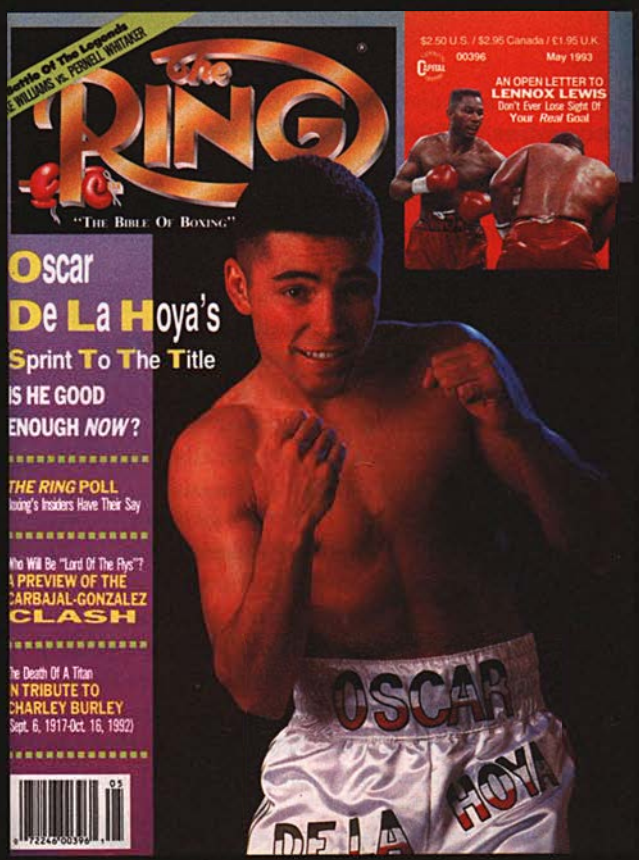
FROM THE ARCHIVES

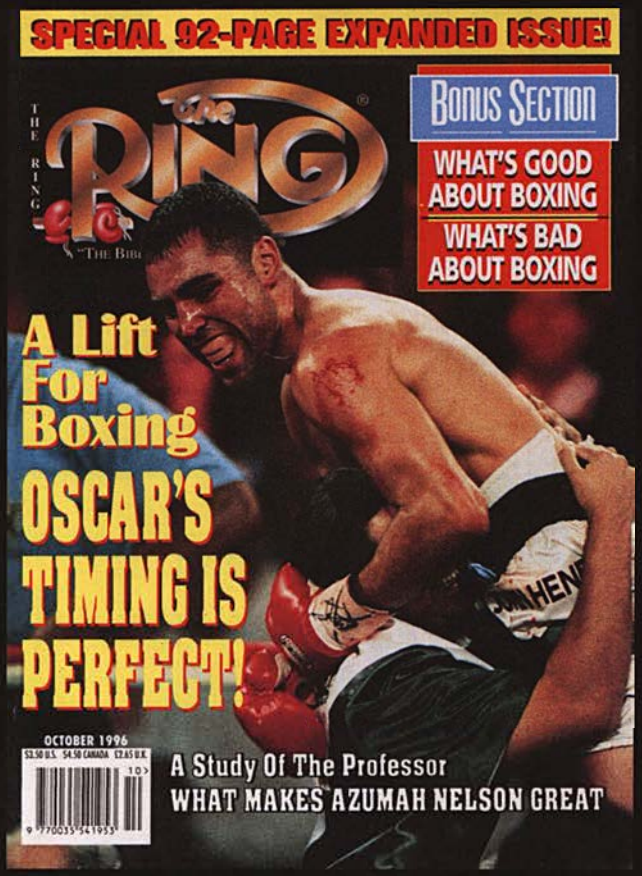




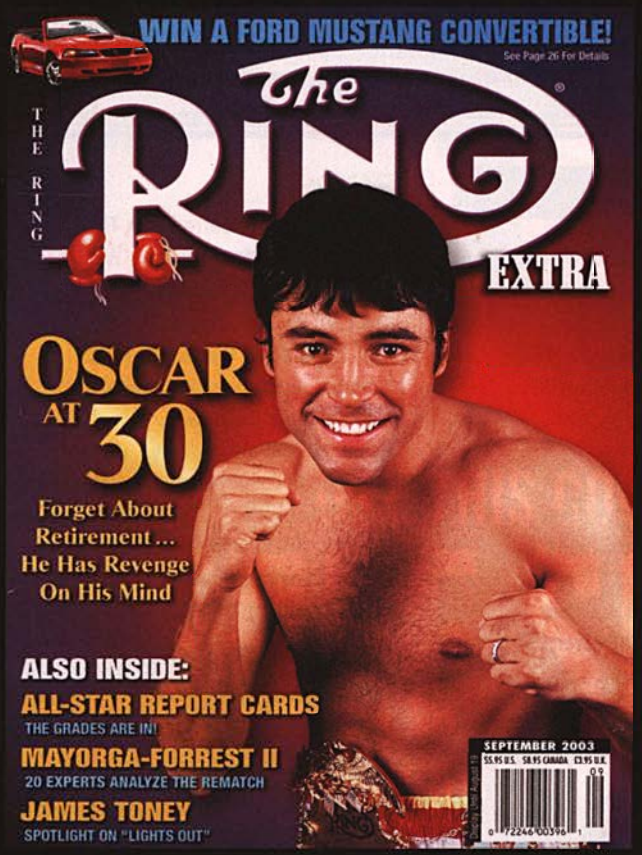
THE GOLDEN BOY TOUCH

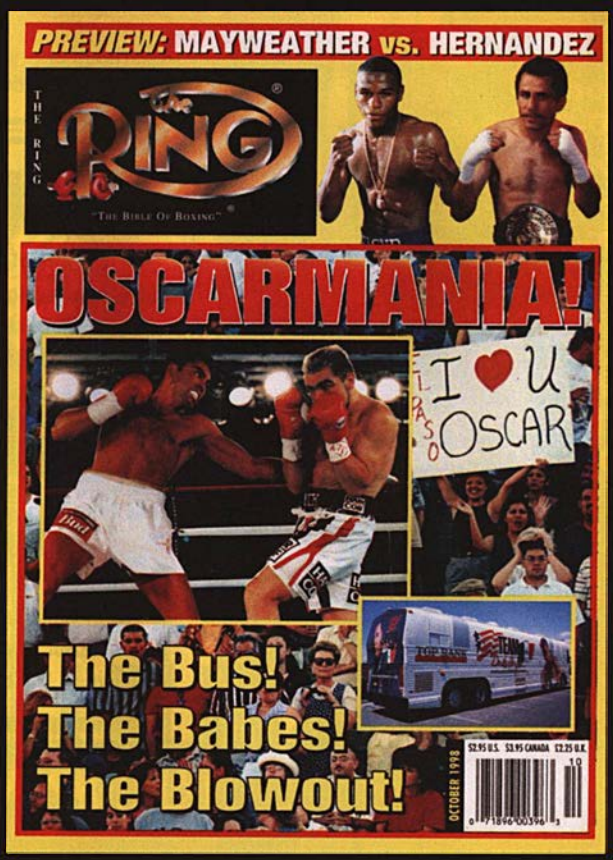




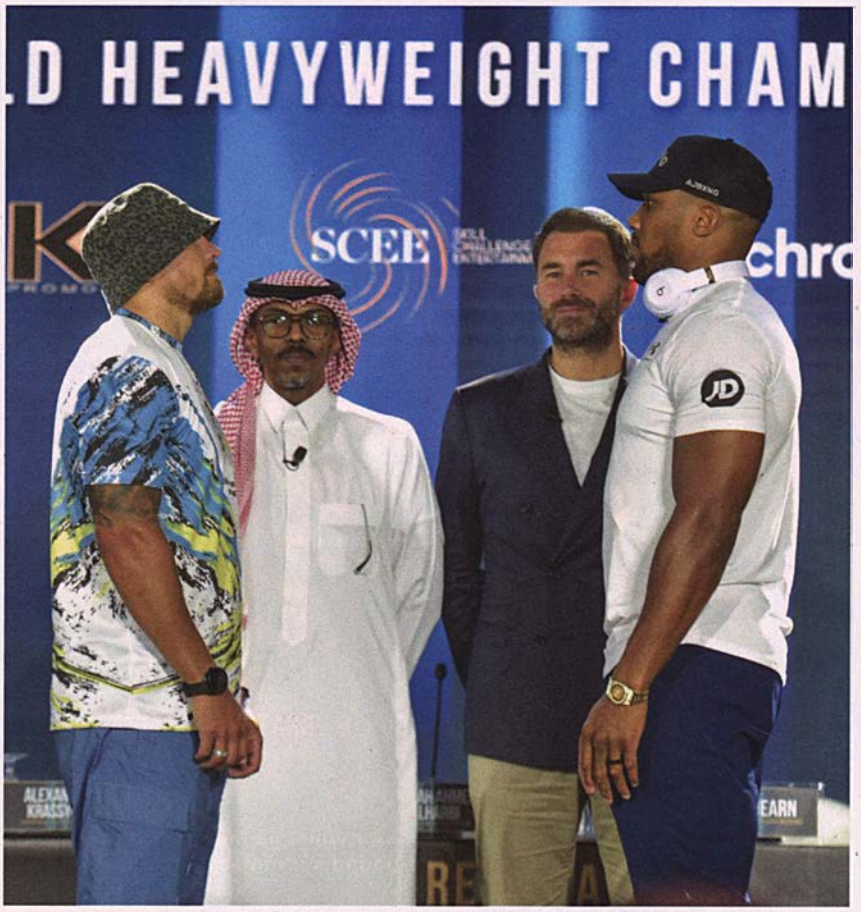


De La Hoya was a popular cover star while he mixed with elite-level contemporaries, cruised through divisions, secured pound-for-pound supremacy and established himself as a truly great fighter.





COMING UP



Unified heavyweight titleholder Oleksandr Usyk and Anthony Joshua will renew hostilities in Saudi Arabia on August 20.

JULY

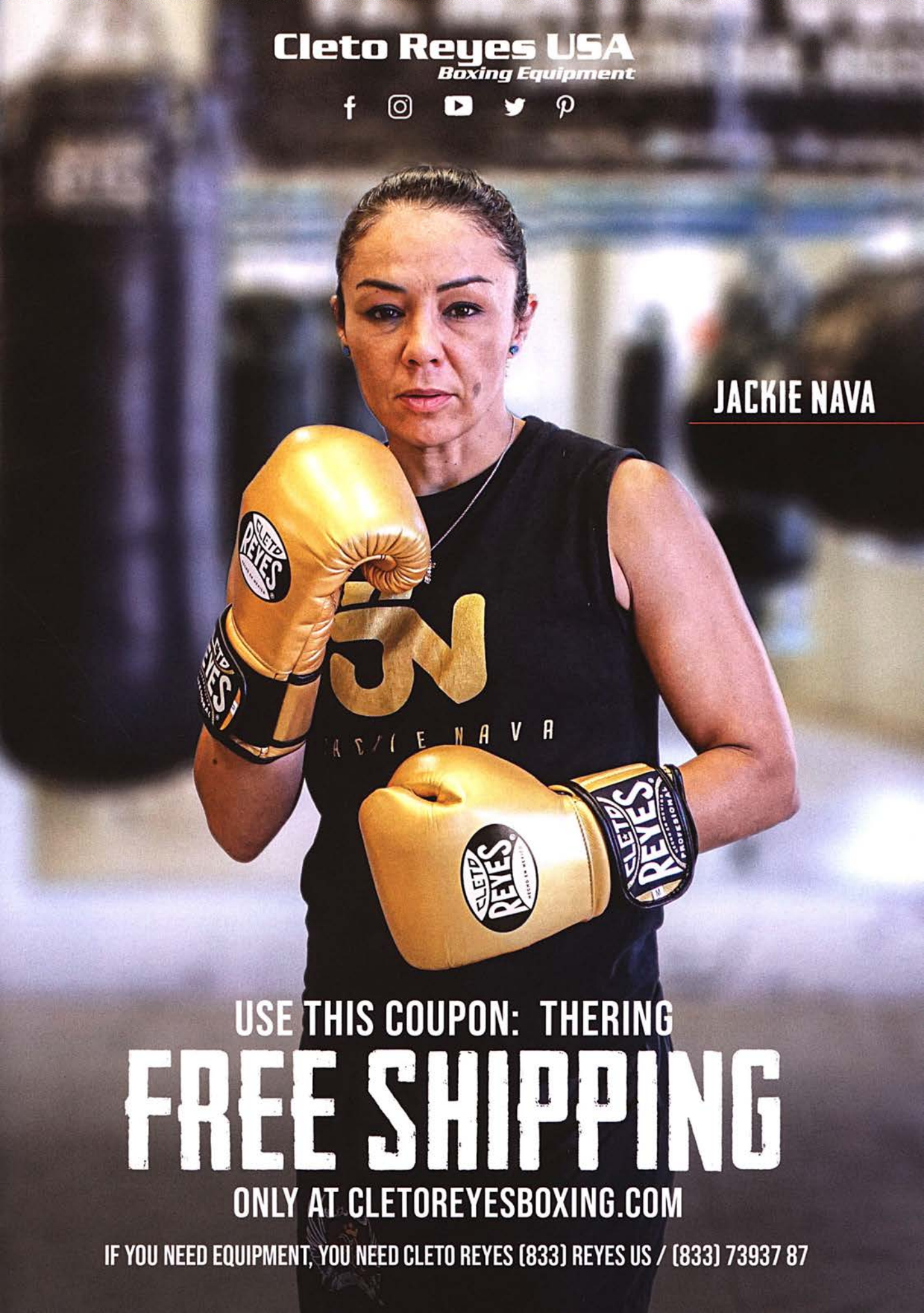
JULY 9 – Derek Chisora vs. Kubrat Pulev, heavyweights, London (DAZN).
JULY 9 – Mark Magsayo vs. Rey Vargas, featherweights (for Magsayo's WBC title), San Antonio, Texas (Showtime).
JULY 16 – Ryan Garcia vs. Javier Fortuna, lightweights, Los Angeles (DAZN).
JULY 23 – Joet Gonzalez vs. Isaac Dogboe, featherweights, Hinkley, Minn. (ESPN+).
JULY 30 – Danny Garcia vs. Jose Benavidez Jr., junior middleweights, Brooklyn, N.Y. (Showtime).

AUGUST

AUG. 6 – Vergil Ortiz vs. Michael McKinson, welterweights, Fort Worth, Texas (DAZN).
AUG. 6 – Amanda Serrano vs. TBA, featherweights (for Serrano's WBC/WBO titles), New York (Showtime PPV). Also, Jake Paul vs. TBA, cruiserweights.
AUG. 6 – Michael Conlan vs. Miguel Marriaga, featherweights, Belfast, Northern Ireland (ESPN+).
AUG. 13 – Teofimo Lopez vs. Pedro Campa, junior welterweights, location TBA (ESPN/ESPN+).
AUG. 20 – Oleksandr Usyk vs. Anthony Joshua, heavyweights (for Usyk's IBF/WBA/WBO titles), Saudi Arabia (DAZN).

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 17 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennadiy Golovkin, super middleweights (for Canelo's Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO titles), Las Vegas (DAZN).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